

UNDERSTANDING THE PALESTINIAN-LEBANESE RESISTANCE



A Conversation with Muîn al-Taher

By Elias Khoury and Michel Nawfal

“Mouin al-Taher: Epics of Steadfastness in Lebanon”.

Dirasat Filastiniya, no. 94, Summer 2013 (pp. 85–117).

Translated from Arabic by Joelle Giappesi, 2018.

Edited and abbreviated by some members of the Norwegian Palestine Committee, 2020.

Understanding the Palestinian-Lebanese resistance

This is an edited and abbreviated version of the English translation of the complete interview which has been published in Arabic. We have added some information about people and places for readers who are not familiar with local geography, or with the history of the region during the 1970s and 80s.

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Oslo, October 2020

Published by Palestinakomiteen i Norge

October 2022

ISBN 978-82-991592-5-8 (print); 978-82-991592-6-5 (ePub)

Printed at X-ide, Lørenskog

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Picture on front page: Young men from Bint Jbeil who confronted the Israeli invasion March 14 to March 16, 1978, in locations like Masoud Hill and Shalaboun Hill. The group was led by Martyr Hassan Sharara (front row, second from left). (Unknown photographer.)

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FOREWORD: TO REMEMBER

This book seeks to recall and document a pioneering experience in the Arab and Palestinian struggle, through a dynamic dialogue with Muîn al Taher. The book's content is closer to a critical review of the experience of the Student Brigade, which was later to become a battalion in the Palestinian 'Assifah forces. The story begins with the biography of the last leader of the Student Brigade, Muîn al-Taher, a model for a generation of young people who were involved in revolutionary guerrilla action during the rise of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, following the defeat of June 1967 and the battle of Karamah (the Battle for Dignity) of 1968, which turned Fatah into a popular organization that attracted volunteers from all over the Arab world. The dialog also addresses the experience of Jordan, where some Palestinian extremist theories and practices led to clashes with the Jordanian regime. As a result, the resistance lost its base in Jordan and moved its leadership to Lebanon.

In light of the critical review of the bitter experience in Jordan, some leftist militants, such as Munîr Shafîq and Naji Alloush, emerged to foster an independent left-wing movement, which brought a new spirit to Fatah's student movement and gave birth to the Student Brigade. Thanks to its activities against the Zionist enemy, the brigade attracted a number of groups of the leftist Lebanese revolutionary wing to help in reconstructing villages in southern Lebanon destroyed by Israel. It also took critical positions towards the Palestinian political leadership, mainly to oppose the policy of settlement with Israel and reject the ten-point program adopted by the PLO in 1974.

The main concern of the Student Brigade, on the intellectual side, was to construct a theory that would benefit from the Vietnamese and Chinese experiences for the Arab Revolution, including the Palestinian Revolution. Munîr Shafîq (Abu Fadi) played a distinguished role in this field through his writings, especially through his book "About the contradiction and practice in the Palestinian Revolution." The brigade included a large number of Arabs, Iranians, Turks and some Western leftists.

The brigade fought against the right-wing militias in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and many martyrs fell, especially in the battles of Mount Sannine (1976). In the aftermath of the heroic battle of Bhamdoun with the Syrian Forces (1976), the Student Brigade regained its basic focus on confronting the Zionist enemy and emerged from the quagmire of the internal Lebanese conflict. And so it went to the city of Bint Jbeil in southern Lebanon to resist the Israeli-backed militia of Saad Haddad. The Student Brigade joined the 'Assifah

forces and took the name of the Jarmaq¹ Battalion, in order to be part of the Palestinian political system, acquire military experience and be in bases in the South, nearer to Palestine. The battalion fought crucial battles which reached far beyond the Israeli lines during the 1978 invasion and succeeded in building relations of close cooperation with the Shi'ah movement Amal (Movement of the deprived) initiated by Imam Musa al-Sadr. Those relations lasted till the Israeli invasion of 1978, founded on an approach to expand the framework of alliances with conservative national figures such as Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, Mufti Sheikh Hassan Khaled and president Rashîd Karami.

The success of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 changed the balance of forces in the Middle East, and particularly in Lebanon. The Iranian Revolution gave contemporary Islam a new revolutionary image, adding an intellectual dimension to the cultural and ideological context in which the experience of the battalion flourished, being the effective center of the independent leftist movement, and a part of a much larger network including neighborhood committees in the cities as well as organizations in the regions and universities in Lebanon.

Despite the legitimate bet that the Iranian newborn Revolution could strengthen the Palestinian Revolution and struggle against Israel and compensate for Egypt's geopolitics losses encumbered by the Camp David Accord, the situation was deteriorating in Lebanon as a result of the Iraq-Iran war and its consequences on the political and military sides.

Amal's influence in the South and its involvement in armed conflicts with parties of the Lebanese National Movement threatened the concept of the "safe base" of the Palestinian Revolution in southern Lebanon and paved the way for the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The battalion and its network were committed to the principle of steadfastness, perseverance and escalation in the fighting against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, especially in southern Lebanon and the Chouf Mountain. Their strategy was to penetrate the lines occupied by the enemy and carry out deadly operations that caused great loss of life and equipment. They also played a prominent role in defending Beirut against the Israeli siege. In this, the forces of the battalion applied the slogan of fighting until martyrdom, bringing a legendary dimension to the historical record of the Arab resistance. At that time, in the iconic battle of Beaufort, the resistance lost 24 martyrs

1) Jabal (mountain) al-Jarmaq is the highest mountain in Palestine.

of Palestinian, Lebanese and other Arab nationalities. The Israeli forces also suffered big direct losses during these physical confrontations.

In its complex course between the horizons of the Arab Revolution and the objectives of the Palestinian Revolution, amidst the problems of the Lebanese-Palestinian relations and the challenges of Syrian tutelage, the left-wing nationalist independence movement developed a winding path, focusing on the main contradiction with the Israeli occupation and colonization system, while addressing simultaneously the secondary contradictions with the Arab states in a smart and wise manner, so that the main contradiction would not sink in the sea of secondary contradictions and the compass would remain directed towards Palestine.

It was not easy to maintain leadership and independence within the complex structure of the PLO movement while the conflict with the pro-Soviet left-wing was pervading the Palestinian political class. Nor was it easy to defend the national orientation of the

Palestinian leadership and at the same time, keep practicing criticism against some of the policies followed by this very same leadership, and resist the spread of corruption, favoritism and laxity in the ranks of Fatah and its political and administrative organization.

The independent line opposed the Oslo process, warning of its catastrophic consequences. However, it faced great difficulties in managing the return to Palestine while the Fatah structure was destabilized by the severe blow from the Zionist annihilation of its prominent leaders, the hard core of the leadership of the PLO.

Let us not forget the connection to the Norwegian solidarity movement and the presence of its activists on the struggle field in Lebanon among the people

Let us remember those days

Michel Nawfal

FATAH AND THE INDEPENDENT LEFTIST MOVEMENT

Fatah, the movement of the Palestinian people. The battle for dignity in response to the setback of June 1967. The events of Black September and the move to Lebanon. Building a new left stream. The battle of Beirut 1973. A radical discussion with Yasser Arafat.

Mu'in al Taher, leader of the Jarmaq battalion and of the students brigade, will you tell us your story with the Fatah movement and the 'Assifah forces?

I joined Fatah after the June 1967² setback, I was 15 years old and my entire generation was seeking a way to resist. When I joined the Fatah movement, I had no idea what Fatah was, we were looking for a resistance movement against the Zionist occupation of Palestine, as a reaction to the setback of June 1967. Later on, I began to discover that Fatah, by virtue of its ideology and thinking, was the movement of the Palestinian people in all its classes and categories. Seeing Fatah as the Palestinian national liberation movement allowed the individuals, regardless of their ideological background and orientation, to belong to it as long as they believed that the main contradiction is with the Zionist enemy. Fatah offered the space to exercise their convictions, which has led many people of different ideological and organizational affiliations to integrate in the movement.

How did you live this experience?

From the very beginning I saw it as an anti-occupation movement. A movement that talks about the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea; the liberation of all Palestinian soil, mirroring a reaction to the setback of June, and providing various means and methods for actual resistance against the occupation. I was in the West Bank and then moved to Jordan.

When the setback took place, I was in Nablus and joined Fatah there. Our mission was to collect remnants of weapons and munitions left from the war. During the war I was a volunteer in the Popular Self-defense, and we were waiting for the rifles to be distributed to us. When the Zionist tanks entered the city, we thought they were Arab tanks, coming from the east, and we gathered around them until they suddenly began to shoot us. For two days, I was left outside the school, which became a Popular Self-defense center where a number of soldiers of the Jordanian Arab Army had sought shelter. We buried their weapons in the yard of the school and it was the first weapons we got a hand on. We did not know how to use them, so we handed them over to our officials. One day they told us that Dr. Nûr would meet with us, and I did not know that Dr. Nûr was Yasser Arafat until many years later. During the occupation, I worked as a street vendor on a stand

I set in front of the family bookstore, in Nablus. Then after three or four months I had to leave town with my mother, as my brothers were abroad, and they were the ones sustaining us. I left the West Bank for Jordan and stayed with my mother in the city of Irbid.

What exactly did you do during that period?

At that time, I became a member of Fatah's student organization in northern Jordan and one of the founders of the Students' Union of the Two Banks. I had with me Ali Abu Tawq who later died in martyrdom, and a group of young people, including Shams al-Tini, who stayed with us for a long time in Beirut, as well as Kifah (Moussa Amer) and Nidal Abu al-Hoyja.

In the Karameh battle (the Battle for Dignity) we went towards the Jordan Valley, and I remember that we took 9 mm ammunition from one of the Jordanian army points. We had the submachine guns of Carlo, Sten and Schmeizer, the weapon that was available everywhere at the time. But on the outskirts of the area of Wadi el-Yâbis, groups of Fedayeen and soldiers of the Jordanian army prevented us to progress, so we held on there until the evening, in anticipation of the development of the Zionist attack.

In addition to my work in the organization, I worked as a volunteer youth coach in Irbid Camp, and al-Hosn Camp.

At the time of the events of September, the student organization had 300 trained and armed students, but there were no real confrontations at that time within the city of Irbid, which was under the control of the Palestinian Resistance. The poet Khaled Abu Khaled took over the leadership and appointed several deputies. I happened to be one of them, even though I was only 18 years old. The main confrontation took place outside the city, between the Palestine Liberation Army forces supported by Syrian forces, and the 40th Brigade of the Jordanian Army.

After the events of September, I left Jordan for Cairo to study engineering at the American University there, but I was prevented from entering Cairo, as at that time the Egyptian authorities were preventing all young people of Palestinian origin from entering the country. There was a room at Cairo airport known as the room of Palestinian deportees, and I slept 3 or 4 nights there waiting for the plane that eventually took me back to Damascus, and from there to Beirut where my desire (to be in Beirut) won against the will of my parents.

2) The June 1967 war between Israel and the neighboring Arab states Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

So far we have been through the events of September, and earlier through those of the Battle for Dignity (Karameh battle). How did these two turns impact you?

After the Battle of Karameh, the Fatah movement moved from an elite organization to an organization that was then called the “bus organization”. Before that battle, a person standing in any yard of any city in Jordan, announcing that he was moving to Karameh, could attract dozens of volunteers. After this battle, thousands of volunteers poured in from across the Arab world. Most of them became members or supporters of Fatah. I remember that by virtue of my organizational position, I would sometimes inspect the night shifts of the Irbid guard, and would find there my schoolteacher, my elder brother and my neighbors! Fatah thus became a much larger and popular organization.

September is a different story. Of course, we are now reading the September events in the light of their impact and their results as of today, and not in the light of the atmosphere when they occurred. Indeed, there is no doubt that we need a rigorous critical examination of the many practices, attitudes, slogans, and policies that were implemented at that stage.

Were you in Irbid at that time, and not in Amman - how was the situation there?

Yes, I was in Irbid. Six or seven months before the events of September, an officer of the Palestinian Resistance there could fire thousands of shots cheerfully at his wedding, and the ceremony lasted six or seven days. Even King Hussein cited this incident in one of his speeches. We had established a union of students called the Students’ Union of the Two Banks.

In Jordan, they decided to celebrate Army Day. I do not know where it was decided that this celebration was against the Revolution (i.e., the Palestinian Resistance). We decided to take a peaceful action to prevent school students from villages around Irbid from going to Amman to participate in the national event. We set foot in front of army buses carrying students from schools. For most of the villagers, the army was the source of livelihood, most of them were sons and relatives of soldiers and officers in the Jordanian Arab Army. They saw us preventing them from going to Amman, which they might visit for the first time. Some of them were crying and we could not explain our position: Why were we preventing them from going to

Amman? It is true that no violence or weapon had been used, but I mention it as an example of wrong behavior.

Not to mention the more leftist slogans: “No power is beyond the power of resistance,” “All the power is one of resistance”, and so on ... The hijacking of planes, the multiplicity of decision-making centers, and the campaign of incitement that President Gamal Abdel Nasser had to face after approving the Rogers’ project. You could oppose the Rogers plan without being against Abdel Nasser; The irony about the public’s awareness and precision of intuition is that on the day of Nasser’s death (28. September 1970), despite the suffering of the camps from bombing, hunger and siege, they all forgot all of their suffering. There was no house without a black flag over it, an expression of sadness for the great one deceased.

I think that one of the fundamental mistakes we made in Jordan came from within the Revolution itself. The Battle for Dignity (Karameh) provided us with a positive atmosphere that we did not invest in. A tremendous cohesion was achieved between the Jordanian army and the Palestinian Resistance. For a long time, the army continued to protect the Fedayeen operations with artillery. The funeral of the martyrs of Al Karameh battle included tens of thousands from all Jordanian areas, but what was the result? Before the events of September, the Fedayeen bases had withdrawn from all the Jordanian regions, in the north, south and center, and resorted to the big cities and camps. What does this mean? Does not this mean that we had not succeeded in establishing the popular rooting, except in the big cities and camps, and within some elites, and that we failed to establish it among the Jordanian public and in its rural and Bedouin bases? One might say that this was instigated by the regime.



Karameh memorial, Jordan (postcard).

This may be true but, the problem was that the political orientation had greatly emphasized that its core was Palestinian, rather than being an Arab-Palestinian revolution.

There was indeed a plan to liquidate the Revolution and its weapons, but on our side, we provided them with excuses and climate, while not taking the necessary precautions to confront them, and our performance was below average.

What can you tell about the new left-wing movement that was formed from various origins and sources in the bosom of the large organization called Fatah? It would later be a pioneering experience for Arab youth, not just young Palestinians.

After leaving Jordan, controversy and discussion took place among a large group of intellectuals, thinkers and cadres in Fatah, who held a critical view of the leadership and the experience of the Revolution in Jordan. These groups were known as the left-wing of Fatah.

They all had a critical view of leadership practices. But they did not come up with results, as the discussions were mainly about criticizing the leadership, without offering any practical programs. We would go and speak and curse, and then come back and rejoice that we had categorized right and left, unable however to do anything fruitful.

By then, Martyr Abu Hassan Qassem, along with Martyr Saad Jaradat, had developed a coherent theory of the leftist and revolutionary work of Fatah. This theory was fundamentally different from that of the Fatah leftists, which were mostly heading towards the Soviet line. The dialogue began within a slightly narrower group with some cadres of Al'Assifah and from the student organization, and other militants.

This was the core nucleus that began to form around a full program.

In 1973, two main events occurred: that of May 1973 and the October war. The May 1973 experience led to the development of a military formation, later known as the Student Brigade.

Could we clarify for the reader what was the May 1973 experience, and enter more into the details of this founding stage?

In May 1973, a confrontation took place in Beirut with the Lebanese army, when the latter decided to enter the area of Beirut Arab University in Tariq Jdideh neighborhood. The intention was to reach the Palestinian Resistance offices in that area and advance towards the Fakhani and Sabra. Of course, with the proximity of

the Beirut Arab University, the students were the first to notice the advance of the Lebanese army.

We had a few weapons in the houses of some of the students. We went out to the street and confronted the Lebanese army force in its progression from the Cola roundabout, in cooperation with some of the offices groups, including Abu Hasan Qassem and Brother Guevara, who destroyed a military vehicle of the Lebanese army on the Cola roundabout. On the same day the members of the student organization in universities and high schools were mobilized, and Martyr Abu Hassan Qassem was chosen to lead them. Fatah's student organization became the custodian of the region of the Arab University from 1973 to 1982. From May 1973 this organisation remained for more than two months in fixed positions until the events ended. It was entrusted with the task of guarding the area, in anticipation of Israeli attacks similar to those that took place in the Verdun operation of April 1973.

The battle allowed for greater integration and deeper dialogue among the participating groups. Some of the leaders knew each other, but since everyone came just out of duty to help manning the positions, it was necessary to organize training camps and to hold military and educational courses.

On the other hand, the Lebanese National Movement, or the Lebanese left-wing, experienced a big crisis resulting from the June 1967 war. Large groups of leftists were quitting their organizations, such as the Communist Party and the Communist Action Organization, after they found out that the one place where they could live by their convictions was Fatah. Dozens of groups and formations and hundreds of people from the Lebanese left-wing joined Fatah, and others joined the "democratic" and "popular" fronts.³ For large segments of these groups, the students' environment provided a melting pot where interaction and integration were possible, promoted by a specific cultural situation, intellectual discussion and actual practice on the ground.

This presence of Fatah in the university context had a left-wing approach of a very different nature from the prevailing leftist tendencies. There was a wide side struggle over the ideology, strategy and political line of the left-wing. This allowed a number of groups and individuals, Lebanese and Arabs, with Marxist-Leninist tendencies and influenced by Mao Zedong's ideas, to join the trend and bring an additional ideological dimension.

3) Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DPFLP) and Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

In Lebanon there were generally two theories of political action: the first focused on the social struggle and the fight for the social demands.⁴

The second started to develop with the presence of the Palestinian Resistance, and gave priority to the national struggle, tackling the Israeli attacks on the South and the issue of the main contradiction with the Zionist enemy. This was mainly apparent in Lebanese universities. For example, the social reform trend emerged under the direction of the Student Union of the Lebanese University. At the same time the National Student Front was established in the American University and the Lebanese and Arab Universities, to challenge factions affiliated with the Lebanese National Movement.

The battle of Kfar Shuba in January 1975 resulted in a complete separation between these two lines: the Zionist enemy entered Kfar Shuba, and the battle broke out. At the beginning of the battle, we, the Student Brigade, sent 90 fighters to Kfar Shuba, and ended the battle. But something had to be done to address the destructions in the village. The National Student Front took an initiative in this respect, in cooperation with Sayyid Musa al-Sadr. We went to Kfar Shuba, and focused on the need to reconstruct the village, and restore normal life to it, with the participation of all the student groups that came there.

This initiative made a difference in the style of political action and the method of struggle on the Lebanese arena. I recall that Sayyid Hani Fahs was one of the people who visited Kfar Shuba with Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, and then the Amal Movement, or the Movement of the Deprived began to appear at the initiative of Sayyid Musa al-Sadr.

A second decisive factor was the October 1973 war, which was a great war that broke the myth of Israeli military superiority. It led to a set of results, some positive, some negative. It proved that Arab solidarity was not harmful for the Palestinian cause and could be useful. And when Arabs were divided, setbacks should be expected and were likely to happen in the Palestinian arena. The concept of Arab solidarity was not approved by all, because some would classify Arabs as either reactionaries or progressive and would put the "reactionaries" on the same side of the main contradiction⁵ as the Zionist enemy. This provoked a new split.

Another important point: the struggle between positions towards the October war was a bitter one. Some refused to consider it an "act of war" and criticized it,

while we were glorifying it as an Arab war that the Arabs dared to fight, and break the Bar Lev line.

In addition, the political results of the Tishrin⁶ war were beginning to produce a compromise. The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), in agreement with Yasser Arafat and Salah Khalaf and with their protection, began to propose a phased program that evolved into the so-called Ten Point Program. All the factions contributed to its formulation but, the Democratic Front was a "reconnaissance patrol" in this regard.

The Ten Point Program had created a situation of debate within the left-wing, and finally led to divergence. We were against the settling process⁷ in full, against the 10-point program and against the slogan of national authority.⁸ However, all these features gradually raised other topics. For instance, the question of independence, of non-affiliation. The other leftist groups were getting more and more aligned to the Soviet Union and began to show the features of a different intellectual line on the Palestinian arena.

Naji Alloush and Abu Dawūd came out on this line in April 1975. Our main disagreement with Naji and Abu Dawūd occurred with the dispute over isolating the Phalangist Lebanese party and the question of Arab solidarity, and over the approach of the Palestinian leadership itself.

Our group considered that the Palestinian leadership was a national, patriotic leadership, not a treacherous, or deviant, leadership. And that there were points where we disagreed, and others where we agreed. The future development was open to more than one possibility, despite the indicators carried by the Ten Point Program. Its essence was the orientation towards compromise. What then about the Cause⁹? Right from its inception, it was related to the attitude of the leadership. Was it in the position of fighting the enemy? This lasted till Madrid and Oslo in 1993, which means that there were twenty years of potential disagreement about fighting the Zionist enemy.

The main feature of Fatah was that they provided space and field to work, even for people who did not agree 100 % with the Palestinian leadership. At the Beirut Arab University, we were using the university loudspeakers towards Abu Ammar's office, which was 50 meters away, and we kept criticizing relentlessly the

4) This was the position of the Lebanese National Movement (LMN) formed by the traditional left and communist parties. They initially focused on Lebanese social questions, and not on the question of Palestine

5) I.e. an enemy of the same importance.

6) Tishrin, Arabic for October.

7) I.e. compromises with Israel

8) The Ten point program spoke about establishing a "national authority" on any Palestinian soil vacated by Israel. This implied readiness to put off the total liberation of Palestine. (See Glossary: Ten point program.)

9) I.e. the liberation of all of Palestine

10-point, the project of National Authority, the project of a Palestinian state and the Geneva Conference. At the end of the night, Abu Ammar would invite us to meet. We'd talk, disagree then agree, and Abu Ammar would end up sleeping under the protection of the very same rifles that denigrated the program or political project he was putting forward. The Palestinian leadership kept sleeping under the protection of the student organization's guns from 1973 until 1982.

Another essential point at the time was the Masyâf camp in 1974. We had decided to establish an educational and military camp for the reeducation and training of the student organization. I recall that it was in December, and it was raining non-stop for days, and a group of intellectuals, scholars and leaders came to the camp to organize seminars. Dr. Abu Omar Hanna was the political officer in charge of the course in general because he was a member of the regional committee supervising the student organization at the time. Naji Alloush, Munir Shafiq and others participated in the seminars, lectures and debates that took place. Suddenly, on one stormy night, Brother Abu Ammar came to the camp, and it was clear that the news of the intellectual storm had reached him; the atmosphere inside the large tent seemed even more turbulent than the storm outside. There were more than 150 young men and women in the camp, divided between majority and minority, the majority was with the line we were proposing, facing a minority led by Anis Naccache and Faisal Alami.

Brother Abu Ammar raised the problem of the October war, and that there was a settlement after the war. Were we to be part of this settlement, or not? His

opinion was that we had to be part of it, and we had to accept a Palestinian state, even if it were only in the city of Jericho.

Will you tell us how the discussion with Abu Ammar evolved?

There was a sharp discussion with Brother Abu Ammar, and we thought that his position was not sound, that it was moving the Palestinian Revolution away from its major goals, and that we could not establish a Palestinian state except on areas liberated by the strength of the armed struggle. We believed that the PLO purpose was to liberate Palestine. As for the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, we were convinced that the duty to restore them also lied within the Arab States that had allowed these territories to be occupied while they were under their guardianship. Such as Gaza for Egypt, and the West Bank for Jordan. If these Arab states could retrieve them, without the PLO, which represents the Palestinian people in the negotiations, then the right to self-determination still belonged to the Palestinians. This issue was so much at the top of the disagreement with Abu Ammar that he said: "You mean you want to leave the West Bank to King Hussein? You are the new Hashemites!" He left the camp upset, because he saw that there was a large majority against his opinion, and accused Dr. Abu Omar and Munir Shafiq and others, that they were the ones who incited the youth and the students.

I think this camp was a milestone, because it largely defined the political line of a large segment of young people in preparation for the future. Immediately afterwards, Lebanon's civil war exploded.

SETTING A MILITARY FORM TO THE POLITICAL FRAME

A general Marxist culture. A political nucleus for an Arab revolutionary project. The link between field leadership and conceptualization. The battle of Bhamdoun with the Syrian army. The brigade's move to the South of Lebanon. The challenges of positioning in Bint Jbeil. The importance of the Battle of Maroun al-Ras.

What was the place of Maoism in the new formation? How did Mao Zedong's ideas come into play? All the groups you talked about, from Abu Fares to Naji Al-loush, were adopting Marxism. But when did the elements of the Chinese revolutionary experience enter the ideology? And yourself, Muin al Taher, when did you decide you were a Maoist or a Marxist?

I cannot say that I was a Maoist. As I said earlier, a significant segment of Lebanese leftists, both individuals and groups, entered our Fatah groups.¹⁰ For example, some brothers such as Hilal Raslan (Abu Mahmoud) and all of "the mountain group" were planning to establish the Lebanese-Arabic Communist Party on a Maoist basis. They entered as a group, not as individuals. People entered our groups by tens, by hundreds and they had their own ideas about this question.

Many of those who left the Communist Action Organization had also their own leftist ideas. In addition, Brother Mounir Shafiq played a key role in establishing Fatah's principles with a special application of Marxism, through his famous book "About the Contradiction and Practice of the Palestinian Revolution" and his works on some of the experiences, from the Chinese revolution led by Mao Zedong, and the Vietnamese revolution. For us, at our level of student brigade or as a student battalion later, I do not recall that we discussed the stories of the Gang of Four, or the Cultural Revolution in China, it was not part of our program. Even the story of social imperialism was not on our intellectual agenda. For us, the issue was no more than to maintain the independence of the Palestinian Revolution away from the alliances of international polarization, because international polarization would lead to a cold war and freeze the Palestinian issue. So we should not be part of it. For us, the Chinese and Vietnamese experiences were patriotic liberation movements that we would use to inspire our analysis, not establish a Maoist Communist Party, or a Marxist Leninist communist intellectual group. But that aspect was sometimes found amongst our brothers who came from other groups. I do not recall any message we sent to the occupied territory or to the prisons where we spoke about these issues. In internal education,

10) They accepted the independent line of the group and joined not for abu Ammar, but for a greater goal, an Arab revolution (Personal communication M Nawfal November 2019).

we focused on independence, on the "mass line", the armed struggle, the "people's war", a set of values and customs, and the most important concept of the Main Contradiction¹¹.

Note though that the Red Book¹² was present in all locations, and all the fighters had it.

In other words, I can say that the line adopted by those brothers who became an essential part of the independent line, and who had earlier adopted Mao Zedong's ideas, was a line consistent with the themes put forward by Mao. But there were issues related to our situation, and our own reading differed from that adopted by China, or a number of Maoist movements. For example, we regarded the Soviet Union as a friend of the revolution, but not as an ally, as we emphasized our independence. A review of all our literature and situation assessments, as well as the writings of Munir Shafiq, all confirm this fact. But due to this position the pro-Soviet leftist groups considered us Maoists, because they wanted to follow Soviet policy, including the line of compromise¹³.

In short, our ambition was to build our own theory of revolution, resulting from the specificity of our circumstances, our history and our nation.

The question was about forming consciousness at the group level.

We had a national, patriotic, popular, leftist consciousness, and a general Marxist culture deeply influenced by the Chinese and the Vietnamese experiences but without drowning in their details, with a special respect for the history of Islam, the popular traditions and the mass line. With this understanding, the left here had its own Palestinian Arab character.

11) There were generally two theories of political action: the first focused on the fight for the social demands, the second gave priority to the national struggle and considered that the main contradiction was with the Zionist enemy.

12) Book of statements from speeches and writings by Mao Zedong, printed in small size that could be easily carried. It was bound in bright red cover and distributed widely internationally by China.

13) Compromise (or settlement) with the Zionist enemy

At the level of the battalion, we took from the Maoist experience the topics related to the theory of contradictions, and the people's war, the mass line and the respect for the masses.

But the themes of China's Cultural Revolution did not become a conceptual educational framework. Neither for us, nor for the mainstream of Fatah as a whole.

Back from Masyâf, what happened next? On what ground was the separation from Naji Alloush and Abu Dawûd based?

After Masyâf the identity of this student framework became clear to everyone. We disagreed with Naji Alloush and Abu Dawud on three different points:

Point 1: Their position about the Palestinian leadership, as they both considered that this leadership was treacherous, while we saw it as a patriotic leadership.

Point 2: A dispute over many issues in the Lebanese crisis, for example: our relationship with the Kataeb or Phalangist Party; our relationship with Musa al-Sadr; the question of civil administration¹⁴; the relationship with the Lebanese National Movement, and the way to handle the Lebanese crisis in general.

Point 3: The question of Arab solidarity and our view of it.

Actually, the real disagreement was in our vision of what had to be done, because we focused on building the Student Brigade and on working in the occupied territory and in the Lebanese regions. We did not want to deal with the disagreements concerning Fatah, or criticize the leadership or the Arab regimes. At that stage we saw the need for an understanding with the Syrians, while they both believed that we should be in conflict with the Syrians. As a result, they joined the group of Abu Nidal, and then left him to establish the Arab People's Movement.¹⁵

At this stage, our line began to take shape and scope, and we had a clear position on the Lebanese crisis and the way to manage it. We disagreed with the slogan of isolating the Kataeb. Some were surprised that we were against the isolation of the Kataeb, at a time where we were the fiercest to confront them.

14) The "civil administration" was the name of the administrative structure in the areas under the control of the Lebanese National Movement. The purpose of this new structure was to fill the vacuum caused by the collapse of the Lebanese statehood. The main activities of this civil administration were to provide security, justice, food and energy ... (Personal communication Michel Nawfal 21.7.20)

15) A small Palestinian political faction, led by Naji Alloush. The group was founded as Alloush left the Fatah Revolutionary Council (Abu Nidal) in 1977.

The answer is easy, we would fight the Kataeb when it meant to defend our positions and to defend the Revolution, but not under the slogan that the road to Palestine would pass by Jounieh. We believed that isolating the Kataeb would lead to the isolation of the Christian community and to the partition of Lebanon. It would not isolate the Kataeb as much as it would strengthen them, which would result in the opposite effect to that sought by the action.

It was our view that the Palestinian Revolution should try as quickly as possible to get out of the Lebanese crisis, expand the framework of its alliances, so as not to include only the Lebanese leftists, but also traditional stakeholders such as Imam Musa al-Sadr, and other Lebanese parties, such as Rashid Karami, Mufti Sheikh Hassan Khaled and traditional Islamic leaders.

In short, we agreed with Fatah's basic principles, and one of them was to not interfere in the politics of competing Arab alliances, not interfere in internal affairs and not take sides, while the others wanted to take sides in the name of Palestine and its Resistance.

This approach became a military approach by virtue of the Lebanese crisis, and because Fatah members were forced to defend the areas in which they lived. For example, young people in Ras al Nabaa and the Basta area were forced to defend their neighborhoods to face the Phalangist attack coming from the Ashrafieh area. The same applied to young people in the mountain, the north and other areas. They found themselves forced to form local militias defending the neighborhood, both in the face of attacks by the Kataeb, attempts to displace Christians, or even to confront thugs. The evolution of the Lebanese war forced us to search for a suitable military frame.

Martyr Jawad Abu Shaar who was responsible for the popular self-defense in Lebanon, strongly supported the formation of the Student Brigade and gave it legitimacy. Martyr Saad Jaradat was chosen as the first commander of this Student Brigade, and our dialogue with Martyr Jawad Abu Shaar went beyond the strategic problems related to the armed struggle with Israel.

The basic idea we proposed and agreed on was that each organizational division, or organizational area, would have a combat brigade, and that each of these brigades was to be attached to a battalion of the 'Assifah forces, so that we could create a state of mobilization for the organization on the one hand, and the forces on the other. Thus, for each battalion in the South, there were reservists. For example, the battalion of the Eagles of the Arqoub had reservists in the Tel al-Zaatar camp and so on. The general idea was to combine the militia forces with the 'Assifah forces to mobilize both sides, and we began to work with Jawad Abu Shaar on this project at an accelerated pace, but his martyrdom came even faster.

Jawad did not consider himself part of this framework?

No, he did not. The subject was not brought up, but for all topics that were discussed we agreed with him. Even the issues of independence versus polarization, and the subject of the Main Contradiction. We had no disagreement over these. I remember, we used to meet with Jawad Abu Shaar on a daily basis, every night at 11 pm. We stayed together until 4 am, and after the tour to all the positions, he would go to sleep, and we too. Then we'd meet again the next day. Even moments before his death, we were together in the office of Martyr Saad Jaradat. They told him [Jawad] that Abu Ammar returned to Beirut from travel, so he went to see him. On his way he was targeted by a shell and killed minutes after he left us. This was a great loss, and the project that we were discussing with him, to link the militia units with the 'Assifah forces, stopped after his death.

What about the role of Mahjoub Omar here?

Mahjoub was a very close friend. But the independent line was a small body in a larger structure. Neither Jawad nor Mahjoub were in the small body, but they were present in the larger structure. Mahjoub agreed on most issues that we raised together, even the question of the national authority¹⁶, the 10-Point, and the assertion of the independence of Fatah from the containment of the Soviet. He also agreed on the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries and moving away from the policy of making alliances with particular Arab states. In all questions relating to the Lebanese crisis, the positions were identical. But Mahjoub, with his full support of the leadership of Fatah, especially Abu Ammar and Abu Jihad, was as an Egyptian keen not to clash with the leadership. Whenever he would feel that he could not support certain positions of the leadership, he used to go and spend time with the battalion of the Eagles of the Arqoub led by Martyr Na'im. He considered himself as one of its members.

You mention a small group. Who would determine the leadership tasks?

Abu Hassan Qassem, Hamdi, Marwan Kayaly, Hilal Raslan, Munir Shafiq, Dr. Ismat Mourad, Ali Abu Tawq, Mahmoud al-Alul, Nazir Ubaryand and Martyr Abu Khaled George belonged to the group, as did leaders from Beirut, the Beqaa, the mountains and Hermel, as well as militant Arab leaders. So, the nucleus was large. But it was not formed as a central

committee, or as a political office. Rather, it was a cohesive and moving nucleus, without an organizational structure or an internal system. We were not trying to establish an organization in the traditional sense with a general secretary or a political office or form an organization within the Organization. We did not have plans or ideas of division or attempts to take control of the leadership or grab a share of it. Actually, our work as a movement was not officially opposed to the PLO. Its ultimate goal was to share in the experience of armed struggle but with a degree of independence and differentiation. To be clear, we did not have a project to create a party, and we have to distinguish between a line and a party.

But was it an Arab project?

Yes, the movement was an Arab project, and included many Arabs. The project gathered young people from Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and Iraq. Our political line became an issue not only for the Arabs, but also for the Iranians, the Turks and some Western leftists as well.

As for Brother Abu Fadi (Munir Shafiq), the relationship with him was not built on the basis of "teacher and pupils". Anything he wrote was subject to careful study by a large group of people. There were sometimes sharp discussions, sometimes editing and corrections, so that the speech he published afterwards reflected the view of the group. Munir Shafiq was committed to this rule, and his role was clear, distinctive and pioneering.

How was Saad Jaradat appointed commander of the brigade, and who appointed him?

Saad was chosen through agreement between us and Jawad. Before Saad, the actual military commander of this group was Abu Hassan Qassem. But he had gone on a mission to Jordan related to his eternal project of establishing bases in the occupied territory. Saad was originally the military commander of the Arab University Division. I was the secretary of the division. A young man from the occupied territories was in the process of reeducation and training to lead his patrol back to the occupied territory. His name was Abu el Râtib, and we agreed he would become Saad's vice-commander. In fact, no decision was made by Jawad or Yasser Arafat.

None of us ever decided that he was the leader of this group, and even later when I became commander of the battalion or the brigade, and Marwan became vice-commander, no one gave us an order to appoint one or the other. The advantage of Fatah is that you are in a movement with which you disagree in some of its policies, but you agree with its national leadership on something fundamental that you fight against, the

16) The 10-point program called for the establishment of a national authority "over every part of Palestinian territory that is liberated" (see Ten Point Program).

Main Enemy¹⁷, and something you fight for, called the Palestinian Revolution. Otherwise, you can discuss, vary and strive to what you deem appropriate and take responsibility for your diligence.

The brigade was formed in agreement with Jawad. Saad became commander of the brigade, and Abu el Râtib became vice-commander. And you, what was your position?

I was responsible for the Organization in Beirut Arab University, and a member of the student office when the brigade was formed. A month later, I was chosen by Brother Abu Jihad to be the deputy commander of the Military School and a political commissioner for it, and this required me to leave for Damascus for a limited period.

Did you ever study at the Military School?

No, war taught us war. I went as a political commissioner for the Military School.

You went as a commander of the Military School to graduate officers, and you never attended the officers' courses?

I went by means of experience gained from regular military courses like all young people in Fatah. I went as a political commissioner, and I was responsible for the educational aspect of the session, after the General Command issued an order stating that the political commissioner is a deputy to the commander of the force of which he is a member. This order was not very respected anyway.

Who was the commander of the Military School?

He was a pioneer named Mutlaq Hamdan (Abu Fawaz), one of the finest officers, from East Jordan. He belonged to a large clan and joined the Revolution in September 1970, when he left the battalion that he commanded in the Jordanian Army. This course was attended by a group of students.

We did not spend much time in Damascus because the civil war in Lebanon had erupted. When the Arab Lebanon Army break out took place, led by Ahmed Khatib¹⁸, it was decided to transfer the Military School's force to the Beqaa, so I moved with them to the Beqaa.

We stayed for two months in the Beqaa. After a while, some returned to Damascus to complete the

course, while the rest joined their units. I talked Brother Abu Ammar into rewarding young people who joined their units and fought and did not return to the session, and he issued an order to promote them to the rank of lieutenant without completing the course of the Military School.

I stayed in Lebanon, and on the day Saad Jaradat was martyred in Beirut's Barjawi neighborhood¹⁹, I was in Sannine, because my tenure was there. Brother Rabih, from a group of local committees in the mountain, came and said to me: "Come, the men are asking for your presence", and I did not hear a word about Saad's martyrdom during the whole journey from Sannine to Dhûr el Abbâdiyyeh. I met Brother Abu Fadi, who informed me of the death of Saad during duty, and the martyrdom of a group of youth of the mountain village of Aaraya, and this is one of the three times when my tears flowed.

After the martyrdom of Saad, were you appointed commander of the brigade? Was not Abu el Râtib his vice-commander?

Abu el Râtib had died earlier in a car crash. He was returning from Baysour camp and his Land Rover overturned. Before he was martyred, we had taken him to Baysour to rest. His time to patrol the occupied territories was approaching. Here we come to the story of the hero Abu el Râtib.

In practice, the brigade was present in most of the strategic positions in West-Beirut because its members were residing near these axes, but it began to take other positions when other missions were requested; and the first was to send a faction to participate in the occupation of Damour. The squad led by Abu el Râtib achieved the military duty as required. When the looting, robbery, destruction and killing of civilians started, the Damour squad withdrew to protest what was happening, after having informed the commander of the attack Colonel Abu Musa about these overrides, and that no action had been taken. Abu Musa accused the squad of fleeing the battle. They were then summoned by Abu Ayyâd (Salâh Khalaf), and told him what happened, and why they left the field in protest. They proved that they had accomplished their duty. They had occupied the region as required. Then Brother Abu Ayyâd told them "you are the conscience of Fatah", and spread this story widely.

After that, we were asked to participate, whenever a battle broke out somewhere, in Kahaleh or Aaraya in the mountain, in Aintura and Sannine. The Sannine battles are among the most prominent points in the history of the battalion. Abu Khaled (George 'Assal), one of the most prominent founders of the line, al-

17) The main enemy, here: the Zionist enemy.

18) On January 21, 1976 Ahmed Khatib lead a break-away by muslim soldiers from the national Lebanese Army, forming the Lebanese Arab Army.

19) Saad Jaradat was killed June 26, 1976.

ways distinguished at the level of theory and practice, died there in martyrdom. And so did the elite of the best young men in the brigade, such as engineer Tony al-Nems, who was martyred on the very day he was to celebrate his graduation from the American University, Mohammed Shbâro, Hamâd Haidar, Jamâl Al Qaray, Harb Jamjûm, Hasanein, Ayman Barqâwi and Nicolas Abboud. The blows in Sannine were painful and destructive, yet we held the position for a long time. The battle was led by Abu Khaled al-Amleh, and we were at great odds with him on the battle plan and the strategic vision. Our view was that we must avoid confrontation with the Syrians, that a new agreement should be reached with Syria, and that we should find solutions to this civil war. While their (his and other Fatah leftists) opinion, together with some sectors of the Lebanese left-wing, was that the front extends from Sofar to Moscow, and they named their base the Red Niche.

During that period, Fatah's leftists and some Lebanese left-wing factions dominated Fatah's political and military decision and were pushing for a military solution to the civil war. I think that Abu Ammar and Abu Jihad did not agree on this approach, but they were unable to stop it.

I recall that on several occasions, the rockets would be landing on Eastern Beirut at the very moment that a cease-fire agreement was announced. Perhaps the most prominent of those occasions was the crazy bombing that was nicknamed by the newspaper "as-Safîr" "the night Achrafieh was disciplined".²⁰ This was in response to an agreement carried out by Abu Zaîm in Kaslik, which included substantial concessions from the Christian camp to the Resistance and the National Movement. Arafat was accused of having made a deal which went against their decision to isolate the Kataeb.

20) Abu Ammar wanted a ceasefire with the phalangists, but the Soviet-leaning groups in Fatah bombarded Aschrafieh. (Personal communication M Nawfal November 2019.)



Poster in memory of Saad Jaradat, the first leader of the Student Brigade. (Unknown photographer.)

Saad was martyred in the battle of Barjawi in Beirut near the Tower of Nazareth, in an attempt to lift the siege on the camp of Tel al-Zaatar, and that was the same night he was supposed to propose to his fiancée. Then I was chosen as a leader of the battalion in its new phase, and I realized that this force, scattered and stretching from Khandaq el-Ghamîq in Beirut to the mountain and Sannine must first be organized.

We asked Brother Abu Jihad to replace our force in Sannine with another force. We began to gather the battalion in the camp of Baysour for reeducation and training after the death of dozens of martyrs during the confrontations. We had withdrawn from the Sannine front for only two weeks, when it was defeated. Aîntura, which Abu Khaled al-'Amleh claimed to hold for months, collapsed in minutes and without a clash after the first waves of Syrian rocket fire. The troops withdrew disorganized in the direction of Ras al-Metn and al-Abadiya al-Tahta.

With the fall of the Aîntura-Sannine front, Abu Ammar and Abu Jihad regained the actual command of the forces, managed the conflict with the Syrians, and the pressure exercised on them by the National Movement weakened.

You said that Abu Jihad began to play a key role in the military leadership. Before that, who had the primary role?

The General Command of the 'Assifah forces at the time was composed of five people: Abu Ammar who was the commander-in-chief, Abu Jihad, Sa'ad Sayel, who was director of central operations, and Abu Saleh and Abu Maher, both based in Damascus and technically at a distance from the forces in the Lebanese arena. We also have to mention that the commander of the South was Abu Musa, the commander of Aintûra was Abu Khaled al-'Amleh, and for Uyûn es-Sîman, it was Yassîn Saadeh. The north was led by Haji Hassan, who was martyred. To replace him, they sent Naîm, Abu al-Wafa and Abu Omar Hanna. On the way, they were killed or lost at sea.

Did you, as the commander of the battalion, gather the young men in Baysour and train them?

Of course, it was necessary to reorganize the battalion in the light of our assessment that quite a battle was to come with the Syrians. This battle must be fought so we could impose a cease-fire followed by a cessation of the civil war. Our assessment was also that another battle would follow, but this time in the South, where reports continued that the border enclave led by Saad Haddad began to expand. We began to explore the South before we moved to confront the Syrians at Bhamdoun, and Adham arranged a tour with Abu Maysûn (Abdel Hassan Amin) and Ali Youssef, in which I participated with Martyr Marwan Kayali. We explored the areas of Bint Jbeil and Tire and met with some of the locals. We learned that there were serious threats from Haddad for Bint Jbeil and Hânîn.

We returned to the mountains near Bhamdoun, knowing that we must prepare ourselves to confront at any moment Saad Haddad carrying out his threat against the border region. This would require sending part of the force to the South, so we informed Abu Jihad about it.

In the meantime, we began preparations for the battle of Bhamdoun under the direct supervision of Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad). Abu Ali Masûd, a unit commander, was appointed as commander of Bhamdoun (later, he became the commander of the Tire militia). We started implementing a plan to fortify our positions in Bhamdoun, which were led by Mahmoud al-Alûl, along with a large group of young people, including Adnan Abu Jâber and Guevara, who built the engineered fortifications, the laying of mines and the construction of military obstacles under the supervision of Hilal Raslan (Abu Mahmoud) and Abu Hassan Qassem.

They were a large group of about 60 or 70 young people, including Ammar, Falâh, Sâber, Mansour, Abu Ali, Dr. Shafiq, groups from local committees in the mountain, and many others.

We began to prepare for the confrontation battle in Bhamdoun, and it took place on the main road in the area of villas and palaces. The brothers Mounir Kansu and Youssef Jawad, a graduate student in Germany, were martyred.

Were you with them?

I was in Baysour the first hours of battle and moved at night to Bhamdoun where I met Brother Abu Jihad. We met the young people there and spent the night with them. At dawn, I returned home with Brother Abu Jihad after I left my car there for Brother Mahmoud.

Knowing that the battle ended on the evening of the second day in Bhamdoun, I began to arrange the second line of defense after Bhamdoun, which was on the railway bridge at Dhûr al-Abbadiya, a high entrance towards Kahaleh. The groups took position in that area, and here I recall two incidents on the second day after the Battle of Bhamdoun: The first was reported by one of the brothers. He was at the rail barrier. A taxi driver coming from Bhamdoun, stopped, and said to him: "I want to meet the leader of the position". He answered, "I am in charge here". The driver then informed him: "The Syrian officer above tells you that you are exposed to him, and if he receives fire instructions, he can hurt you. You should take cover".

The second story is about how important it is to assess the political situation during military action. The Syrian army had made moves suggesting its intention to progress in the direction of our new positions. I asked the radio officer in Kayfûn, the headquarters of Abu Jihad, to send a cable to the fighters asking them to assess the position that we had discussed with Abu Hassan Qassem, Abu Mahmoud, Munîr and the rest of the brothers.

At that time all the cables had a direct military character. And here I was asking him to send a cable requesting the fighters to assess their position and degree of steadfastness for the next 24 or 48 hours. The reason was that during this period, an Arab summit was to be held and might lead to a cease-fire, and the end of the civil war. We would then be able to devote ourselves to our main task of fighting against the Zionist enemy. We therefore had to maintain our positions and consolidate them, whatever sacrifices and losses there would be.

The radio commissioner considered me a crap, wondering "who would come to give me this cable at this time?!" Abu Jihad was present, and I told him

"I want to send a cable and the radio commissioner does not want to send it". He read it and told the radio commissioner to send it immediately, and to circulate it to everyone for its importance. The Riyadh conference was held, our assessment of the political situation had been correct, and there was cease-fire.²¹

We had another mission in the mountain, which was to preserve its security when the mountain became a war zone. Here the bad habits associated with fighting came back, especially because it was an area of villas and homes for vacationers. Therefore, the military police established a basic force made of the battalion and of volunteer students from the external provinces, led by Brother Ghazi al-Husseini and Brother Sami. We were able to fully control this issue, through a series of checkpoints on the main intersections, and we granted the inhabitants of the mountain an atmosphere of security, safety and peace.

The battle of Bhamdoun ended and an Arab agreement was made to send an Arab deterring force. We had hardly begun to dismantle our positions on the old railway and in Dhûr el-Abbadiya, when Saad Haddad bombed Bint Jbeil, and a number of martyrs died. He was issuing a warning to the town's people to surrender, so we decided it was time to move to the South. We met with Abu Jihad, who was familiar with the earlier reconnaissance we had done. He was still not sure that the battle with the Syrians had ended and that the cease-fire would hold. He asked us to wait a little. By midnight, he had ascertained that the cease-fire had been proven. He sent me a message which essence was that the entire Student Brigade was to move to Bint Jbeil area.

The arrangements to move hardly took an hour or two, then we went directly to Bint Jbeil in a convoy. The area was supposed to be in the custody of the Central Sector, whose leader was Martyr Bilal and his deputy, Martyr Nûr. The Central Sector was not there in practise; it was still located east of Saida because of the battles with the Syrians, and there were no forces, neither from the National Movement nor from the Palestinian Resistance on the entire border line, till the Tire area.

We went straight to Bint Jbeil area, and the morale of the locals rose. We began to spread on the hills of Mas'ûd, Shaalabun and Saff al-Hawa, and in Aynata and Rchaf. Martyr Hassân Sharâra and his companions from Bint Jbeil, who fought with us in various locations, helped us. The first to reach to us was Abu al-Fath, who was then a Fatah militia chief in that area. In the evening came the deputy commander of the Central Sector, Martyr Nûr.

How many were you?

We were almost 200 fighters, and we managed to prevent Saad Haddad's forces from advancing. Indeed, the day before our arrival, the village of Hanîn was occupied, all its inhabitants were deported, and the village was burned. This was the town of Ali Yûsuf, a local Lebanese militant. We had entered it a week earlier. On August 2, Haddad's forces had killed three of our brothers in the Movement, Martyrs Adel Watfi, Mahmud Qawas and Nazîh Diab, as they were going to the town of Aîn Ebel, in an attempt, together with patriotic locals, to support the local resistance in its infancy.

As soon as we arrived in Bint Jbeil, we launched a series of activities such as combat patrols and reconnaissance operations to confuse the forces of Saad Haddad and make them feel that the balance of power in that region had changed. We allowed the Palestinian Resistance forces to reorganize themselves, withdraw from positions of confrontation with the Syrians, and from the civil war, and return to their positions in the South. We took responsibility for the region on our own for several days, trying to stop the expansion of Saad Haddad's forces.

Can we define more precisely the period between the initiative to bridge the gap in the South and the return of the Palestinian Resistance forces to the region?

We stayed alone in the area of Bint Jbeil and Rchaf for at least two weeks. Then the forces of the Central Sector came, followed by groups of Palestinian factions and of the Lebanese National Movement. The reorganization began.

This operation occurred straight after the Battle of Bhamdoun?

Yes, and before the Arab Deterrent Forces and the Syrian Forces arrived and spread. Our forces were still at the roadblock on the main road leading down to Kahaleh at the Abbadiya hills. Our positions were still there, it was less than 48 hours after the end of the battle of Bhamdoun.

The students who held the positions in Beirut and then fought in Sannine, were they non-professional Fedayeen? Did they come to the South to become Fedayeen?

The decision to join the professional forces did not arise until the moment we reached the South. Then came the transition to a military battalion. We went to the South with the same mindset that led us to Sannine and to all the other sites. Our motto was: a hard-fighting

21) The Arab League summit (Riyadh), October 16, 1976

militant on a hard line. But when it turned out that we were going to stay in the South, we revived the old idea that we had agreed upon with Jawad Abu Sha'er. It was to maintain the status of the student organization and of the movement both in Beirut and in various regions of Lebanon. And that we had an advanced vanguard stationed in the South attached to one of the battalions there.

Unfortunately, the leadership of the region did not accept this idea, because they were not comfortable with the growth of this phenomenon. They said, "We must choose either the militia, or the troops". We chose the troops, and we became a battalion after several the brothers decided to serve as fighters or as soldiers and fully engage in military action.

The political organization and the political line, both in universities and in the various Lebanese regions, kept being a reserve for this unit. The degree of readiness increased, and the number rose from 200 to 400 or 500 people from all Lebanese regions and universities. It was a dynamic movement with a rear force that no organizational decision could prevent or limit.

It should be noted that while some battalions were eroding from the inside, the formation of a combat battalion composed of students and political cadres, added to the 'Assifah forces, was a unique and exceptional achievement, and was a success for the intellectual and political line on which the movement was based.



Top to bottom:

Slogan, signed by the Workers Party (part of the Lebanese National Movement). Read at the marketplace in Bint Jbeil, November 1977: – Nobody defends the South, except for the fighters from the National Movement and the Palestinian Resistance. (Photo by Ebba Wergeland.)



On January 1, 1978, at around 3 p.m., the clinic in Bint Jbeil was hit by nail bombs, anti- personnel explosive devices containing nails to increase effectiveness at harming victims. Windows were broken and small nails could be picked up from the floor. As this was a day off, nobody was injured. (Photo by Ebba Wergeland.)

Nails like those found in the Bint Jbeil clinic in January 1978, can be seen in the War Remnants Museum, Saigon. They are from nailbombs dropped by USA over Vietnam during their Vietnam war 1954–75. (Photo by Anthony Bianco. <https://www.thetraveltart.com/vietnam-war-remnants-museum-ho-chi-minh-city/>)

It is sad though, that the idea of linking forces with units of the organization, a great idea that we agreed upon with Martyr Jawad Abu Sha'er, was achieved only on our level.

Were you getting salaries?

The Student Organization did not receive any salaries, while the brothers who entered the battalion were part of the financial responsibility of the 'Assifah forces.

How did the forces in the South receive you?

The commander of the forces of Qastal was Colonel Abu Musa who did not hide his annoyance at our presence and did not consider us as an enhancement of his forces. We were at least 200 people, and in times of emergency, alert, holidays and weekends, our number would rise to more than 500, but he would send us supplies for only 50 people. He was playing with us on this subject. We would go to Abu Ammar to complain, he would give us a letter instructing to raise the number of rations. Abu Musa committed for two days, and then went back to reduce the supply. It was a long time before Abu Ammar and Abu Jihad fixed this issue. Abu Musa then left the forces, and he did not pay us a visit, not even once.

We began to complete the process of transition to a regular battalion and divided the battalion into factions and units including an administrative unit. We conducted a youth assessment, replacing organizational ranks, educational attainment, and combat experience with military ranks. Military discipline was high: the morning, assembly in lines, the national anthem, the military greeting, and everyone merged into this new discipline which did not exist in many other units.

As we joined the 'Assifah forces, we began to reeducate the military cadres, because we had all learned war through war, and we gained our experience from local battles and trainings. None of us were graduates from a military college, except for Jihad, Adham and Rebhi, who had recently graduated from the Fatah Military College, Adnan Abu Jaber who was coming to us from the Galilee Brigade, and Abu Dhargam, from the Yarmouk forces. We needed a military academic qualification and were encouraged in this direction by Martyr Abu al-Walid, who supported us with his care and with whom we had a strong relationship. We sent Ali Abu Tawq and Riyad to China, Khaled, Marwan and Hussam to Russia, Jihad to Korea, and others to Algeria, Vietnam and Germany. We took a large share of the members of the military college of Fatah. When the men finished their first round of courses, some of them went to more advanced courses. In 1979 I went to train at the Pakistani Infantry School.

Who chose the name of the battalion?

Jabal al-Jarmaq is the highest peak in Palestine, and we chose it because it symbolizes the liberation of all of Palestine.

Let us go back to your position in the Bint Jbeil area.

In Bint Jbeil, we faced four major challenges. The first and most important one was to stop the advance of the border forces led by Major Sami Chidiac, prevent him from expanding towards Bint Jbeil, and let him feel that there was an organized military force capable of confronting him. This was accomplished by positioning on the hills surrounding Bint Jbeil and Rchaf, and by conducting several military activities and reconnaissance patrols in the direction of the enemy



Nina Braadland with bomblets (dismanteled) from cluster munition provided by USA to Israel and used over South Lebanon in 1974–76 (and later). They do not detonate immediately, but behave like conventional land mines that detonate when touched. Nina (staff nurse) was stationed i Bint Jbeil November 1977 – March 1978 as member of a medical team to PLO from the Palestine Committee. (Photo by Ebba Wergeland.)

positions. This forced the Haddad forces to retreat and stop trying, which calmed down the Bint Jbeil front temporarily.

The second challenge: to reassure the population of Bint Jbeil that this force was with them, that we came to protect them, and to put an end to abuses. I think we accomplished this task with success, thanks to the remarkable efforts of our brothers from the locals, led by Martyr Hassan Shararah, and to the network of social and political relations that we established with various stakeholders, in accordance with our political and cultural aims.

The third challenge: reorganizing the battalion under new conditions and transforming it from a volunteer force holding combat positions for days or weeks before being replaced by another force, into a regular battalion stationed in a geographical area, and fully responsible for the said area for both military, security, and political aspects.

The fourth challenge: how to get accepted into the body of the 'Assifah forces in the region, amid an atmosphere of political and organizational agitation. Our main strength was our ability to cope quickly with the reality we were living in, especially as a large and organized force that added a certain weight to the existing forces. Our previous reputation and our military activities against the forces of Saad Haddad helped us, as well as our determination to be part of the forces of Qastal in the 'Assifah forces. That brought us the respect of the people and of the other bodies in the 'Assifah forces. Within a short period of time, we managed to be at the heart of these forces, to be respected by their leaders, and by the leaders of the Palestinian and Lebanese factions. We were able to build privileged relations with many of them, such as Martyr Bilal, leader of the Central Sector.

What can you tell us about the relationship with Bilal, leader of the Central Sector?

Our relationship with martyrs Bilal and Nûr shifted from doubt and suspicion incited by Colonel Abu Musa, to a close relationship that I almost compare with our relationship with Martyr Jawad Abu Sha'ër. By the way, Martyr Jawad was commander of the Central Sector before Martyr Bilal. We disagreed with him in the beginning over the way to deal with the Amal movement and the national and traditional forces, as Bilal was influenced by some leftist views prevailing at the time.

However, his courage and insight made us inseparable, and our joined forces intervened more than once in Bint Jbeil, in the support to the emergency forces, and in the 1982 invasion, until I saw us as one force with one command.

I remember when Haddad's forces occupied the hill of Shalabun, a hill overlooking the Bint Jbeil-Beit Yahun road, how Bilal drove me, from Tibnin to Bint Jbeil, which we reached with several holes of enemy bullets in his car. I remember how Jihad from al-Jarmaq and Abu Ahmed Khamis from the Central Sector led together the counter-attack and retrieved the hill. In the battle of Maroun al-Ras, Bilal went to Tibnin, the headquarters of al-Jarmaq. He and Khaled, the battalion operations officer, took responsibility for coordinating the artillery and logistical support.

On that day, the command of the forces of Qastal opposed the fact that we carried out the counterattack during the day and requested that it be postponed until sufficient forces from various units were mobilized. Bilal was sure of our appreciation of the situation, and of our high combat capability, so he persuaded Hajj Ismaïl, Commander of the forces of Qastal, to change his position. And he was the first to arrive in Bint Jbeil by minutes after the attack ended.

A few days later Bilal went to Beirut and was shocked by what he heard from some groups, questioning the process and the attack. He returned, convinced to develop our relationship away from the bustle of the Beirut salons.

When Israel invaded in 1978 our forces intervened jointly, and we spent a night at the headquarters of the Central Sector in Jwaya. On the next morning, we coordinated the groups and placed Khaled, from al-Jarmaq, as commander of the groups stationed in Jwaya. We moved the headquarters to another building, a few meters away, and we had hardly done so when the Zionist aircrafts bombed the headquarters and destroyed it completely. Death was at a distance of a few meters from us. At many moments, you could think that al-Jarmaq and the Central Sector were one single unit.

How were the forces reorganized?

We stayed in Bint Jbeil in the first phase, and when the rest of the forces returned from the confrontation with the Syrians, the Kataeb and the civil war, the forces were reorganized in the South. We patrolled between the two areas of Bint Jbeil and Rchaf (on the axis Rchaf-Qana – Tire), and another brigade of the 'Assifah forces took responsibility for the sector of Bint Jbeil. But after a short period (three or four months), and at the request of the locals, the leadership felt that we urgently needed to return to Bint Jbeil, and to maintain its security as it was the largest city in the region. We returned and took responsibility for the Bint Jbeil district, and we stayed there until the Zionist enemy invaded the area in 1978. The Central Sector took over the Rchaf-Qana district, and the brigade of Beyt el-Maqdes took over for the Taybeh-Rabb Talatin sector. The brigade of the Martyrs of September returned

to the coast, whereas the brigade of Abu Youssef al-Najjar, led by Martyr Azmi al-Zghayyar, took position on the axis of Tire-Rashidiyeh.

At this stage, the battalion of Bint Jbeil was established, with brothers networking in the various Lebanese regions, under the leadership of Ramadan and Abu Dawûd, with the remarkable support of Dr. Ismat, Sami, Trad, Radwan and Rabi. This battalion played a distinctive role in all the battles we fought, and has given many Lebanese martyrs, thus forming the nucleus of a Lebanese-Arab military action committed to the Palestinian Resistance.

How was the evolution of the conflict on the border between 1976 and 1978?

The main objective of Saad Haddad forces was to link the two wings of the border strip located in Qulaia-Marjayoun on the one hand, and Aîn Ebel-Rmeish on the other, and this could only be achieved by occupying or controlling all the border villages between them. Saad Haddad tried to achieve this through military confrontations to occupy some of these villages, or through pressure on the villagers to control their villages and impose a fait accompli on them, because this area was considered by most as a neutral area, a no man's land.

The first failure of Haddad's forces happened after they occupied Bint Jbeil.²² They retreated as our forces arrived and engaged with them, and they then failed to control the Shalaabun hill, which we were able to recover within hours. Then they managed to occupy the town of Taybeh and the village of Rabb Talatin, but these were quickly retrieved by a coordinated counterattack organized by factions of most of the 'Assifah forces in the region, and we participated in a faction led by Brother Adham, which was in charge of recovering the village of Rabb Talatin.

The day after the success of our attack, Saad Haddad attempted to carry out a counter-attack, but failed miserably and the tank he was leading was hit. He had to leave her on the battlefield after being wounded himself. Brother Adham who was leading the defense was also wounded. Two days later, the Zionists found that they had no choice but to intervene directly to rescue the forces of Haddad from the defeat. An Israeli armored force advanced under a downpour of heavy shelling in the direction of the Taybeh-Rabb Talatin. But at the same moment, they were surprised by the success of another counterattack in the eastern sector, led by Martyr Mohammed Ali Abu Yaqoub to liberate the town of Khyam. Thus, the joint Palestinian-Lebanese forces were on the outskirts of Marjayoun.

As a result of this new situation, the Zionist army was forced to withdraw immediately, leaving only

Haddad's tank and its armored escort, which had been both destroyed on the battlefield. The battle ended the ability of Haddad's forces to expand militarily.

Then started another battle, mainly political and perhaps even more difficult than the military confrontation. Haddad, in cooperation with a Zionist intelligence officer named Jaafar, tried to impose his control over all the border villages, from Maroun al-Ras to Aitaroun, Mays al-Jabal, Hula, and Bleda. They began to pressure the locals in these villages and assemble them in the mosque or the village square, requesting them at gunpoint to join the border strip controlled by Haddad.

On the other hand, we intensified our visits to these villages. We told the locals that we had no intention whatsoever of settling in their villages and give an excuse to the Zionists or Saad Haddad's forces to bomb them. But they also had to refuse to let the forces of Saad Haddad enter their areas by using their ways of civil resistance. We wanted to keep this area neutral, and to make the border project fail politically, after we made it fail militarily.

The peak of this conflict was in the village of Mays al-Jabal, where we cooperated with Sheikh Abdul Amir Qabalan, also known as Mufti al-Jaafari al-Mumtaz (the distinguished Mufti of Jafaar). He was from the same village and had a remarkable leading and orientating role in this confrontation with the town's dignitaries and stakeholders. Our brothers from the village who were members in the Fatah organization also played an important role in confronting the Haddad's forces, and in mobilizing the locals into a unified position. They encouraged people to organize various kinds of protests against the entry of any of Saad Haddad troops into the town, and there were peaceful civil protests.

One day, a patrol of Haddad forces entered the town. The residents gathered in the mosque and confronted the patrol, demanding that they leave immediately. We were surprised by some armed factions from the National Movement threatening to shell the village and direct artillery and missiles at it. This was a childish position, blind to the dimensions of the battle. It forced us to intervene by force, and we told the members of those factions: If you harm this village, we will have to hit you, because this is an attack on the locals and their steadfastness and their determination to confront the forces of Haddad. This is a red line that cannot be questioned.

In fact, we fought a great political struggle along the entire border strip, and we completely thwarted Saad Haddad's plan, thanks to the steadfastness of the locals and their cooperation. Martyr Marwan Kayali was the knight of this struggle.

22) February 1977



Umm Ahmed and her children, preparing food for supper. The family hosted the Norwegian health workers from the Palestine Committee in Bint Jbeil November 1977 – March 1978. (Photo by Ebba Wergeland.)

At that time Haddad's forces resorted to a different tactic, direct force, in occupying the village of Maroun al-Ras. They took advantage of the division between two families: a family who sadly enough had relations with Saad Haddad group, mirroring the political and social differences that exist in most of the villages, and another family allied with the National Movement. Both families sought to protect their interests inside the village.

Maroun al-Ras strategic importance resides in the fact that it completely overlooks the area of Bint Jbeil. Whoever controls Maroun al-Ras, which rises more than 940 meters above sea level, controls the fire on the area to the outskirts of Tibnin, and oversees all of the occupied territories of Palestine, located above the colony Avimim. In view of its importance, the United Arab Command had established several sites and fortifications before 1967, and the international truce monitors²³ had been positioned there since 1948.

At the dawn of March 8, 1978, the forces of Major Sami al-Chidiac, reinforced by tanks, occupied Maroun al-Ras, which immediately witnessed a massive exodus of the inhabitants. Thus, Bint Jbeil became under fire control. The situation was difficult, and it meant that all the villages of the border strip might fall, and we would have to withdraw to the hills of Taybeh and the outskirts of Tibnin.

Ever since our arrival in Bint Jbeil, we always looked up to Maroun al-Ras, overlooking Bint Jbeil, and wondered what would happen if that town (Bint Jbeil) fell under the control of hostile forces. We studied the various possibilities, and although we succeeded in neutralizing the village for a period, we reached

the decision that we had to regain Maroun al Ras immediately and without delay so that the enemy would not be able to strengthen their positions in such a way that the attempt to recover it would become difficult and costly. At 5 am I moved from the battalion headquarters in Tibnin to Bint Jbeil, whose roads were cut by fire and hostile shelling.²⁴ Shafiq al-Ghabra (Jihad) began preparations for the counterattack, and Brother Bilal, commander of the Central Sector attended the leadership of the brigade and began coordinating fire support with the heavy artillery led by Wâssif Oreyqât. We did not wait for any reinforcements from the other forces so as not to waste time, and I rejected the forces command's proposal to postpone the counterattack until we would be completely prepared and mobilized. At 1:00 pm the counterattack was launched.

Did you not have a force in Maroun al Ras?

We did not have forces there because we had an agreement with the village that it was to stay neutral. So, we entered it in civilian clothes and without weapons and we met with the locals. We were not allowed to enter with weapons, neither we nor the forces of Saad Haddad. Hours after they occupied Maroun al-Ras, we recovered it again thanks to an infantry force led by Brother Jihad, which included three factions: one of Fatah, one of the Popular Front led by Maher Yamani and one of the Communist Action Organization. We infiltrated Maroun al-Ras by foot, to control the locality entrance and exit, and secure the main road which connects it with Bint Jbeil. We knew that the infantry force that would reach Maroun al-Ras through the mountain tracks would be exhausted, so we prepared another brigade equipped with weapon, transported by cars and led by Ammar (Atef Badwan), in order to reach the town under the guise of mortar shelling from the brigade led by the creative Fedayeen Raed Abdel Hakim, may he rest in peace, and heavy artillery led by Wâssif Oreyqât. Our target was to maintain the momentum of the attack and rush with other groups in the hunt for the forces of Haddad, to destroy them and prevent them from retreating.

In less than an hour, we took full control of Maroun al-Ras without any losses in our ranks, while 18 soldiers of Saad Haddad were killed. We seized several tanks and armored vehicles that we donated to the

23) The UN Truce Supervision Organization

24) According to the Norwegian medical team who witnessed the battle from Bint Jbeil, it took place one week earlier, on March 2. On March 8 they had already left Bint Jbeil for Beirut, and celebrated Womens Day in Damour.



Left to right: Israeli coins, Israeli canned food (hummus) and ammunition was left behind by the SLA- soldiers when they were chased from Maroun el Ras over the border to Israel on March 2, 1978. The pictures were taken by the team from the Palestine Committee in order to document the cooperation between Israel and the South Lebanese Army (falangist forces in the South). At that time, mainstream media in Norway denied or kept silent about this cooperation. (Photos by Ebba Wergeland.)

Lebanese Arab Army, and we captured a soldier from the forces of Saad Haddad. We remitted him to an official in the Syrian Social Nationalist Party to hand him over to the joint command in Saida. But he was taken to Bint Jbeil square and executed following an old pattern of abuse. The bodies of Saad Haddad's soldiers were placed in the Tibnin hospital for the Red Cross to hand over to their families.

The North of Palestine as far as the eye could see, was across the border, only meters away. The Zionists bombarded the Maroun al-Ras for a full hour, perhaps to give way to the withdrawal of the rest of the scattered groups, and then a great calm prevailed in the region before the storm began to loom on the horizon.

The battle of Maroun al-Ras ended the military role of the forces of Haddad and al-Chidiac. The latter withdrew completely from the picture and settled in the Zionist entity. He no longer dared to return to the no man's land, fearing the families of the dead who accused him of throwing their children into a losing battle.

Very sadly, some groups inside Fatah did not like how fast the battle was settled. They began questioning the facts, and news reached Abu Musa and Abu Saleh making them doubt that the battle had even taken place. They thought that the military vehicles photographed by the newspapers belonged to the Lebanese Arab Army. Fortunately, the Communist Action Organiza-

tion had participated efficiently in the battle. Brother Bilal, commander of the Central sector, played a distinguished role in coordinating artillery and providing fire and logistical support, and these reactions were a shock to him. The factions of the National Movement and the Resistance welcomed the results and the championships of their makers, to the extent that the commander of the Lebanese Arab Army in the region, Major Luqman al-Zein, said at a joint command meeting that a statue should be erected in Bint Jbeil Square for those heroes.



Israeli military vehicle left on Maroun el Ras after the battle on March 2, 1978.

THE ISRAELI INVASION OF 1978 AND THE DIALOG WITH THE AMAL MOVEMENT

The Dalal al-Moghraby operation and the Israeli invasion. Large losses in Bint Jbeil. Strict rules of revolutionary behavior. The Iraq-Iran war and the rise of the Amal movement. Extension of the safe base in Lebanon. Armed clashes in the South 1980–1982. The settling in the Tire area. The political and social activities to construct a revolutionary theory.

What about the 1978 invasion?

The battle of Maroun al-Ras changed the game. After that, the Zionist enemy began to evacuate its nearby settlements. They had to take matters into their own hands. We no longer heard a single shot. We realized that the border control had ended and that the time for direct Zionist military intervention had come.

Days later, on March 8, the operation of martyr Kamal Adwan took place. It was executed by martyr Dalal al-Moghraby and her companions. Dalal was a Fedayeen in the Jarmaq battalion, and a member of the student organization in high schools, under the leadership of Ali Abu Tawq. She participated in Beirut battles, and moved with us from Baysour to Bint Jbeil. In Beirut, young men and women of the battalion were stationed together in the combat positions, but in the South, the situation was more difficult. It was a tradition of the battalion to respect the customs and traditions of the locals. We tried to establish a full female platoon, but the number of sisters was not sufficient for that. Besides, Dalal was not satisfied working in the dispensary, run by a group composed of Brother Dr. Khaled coming from France and Brother Aqba, Sister Bahia and Dr. Ezzat. They were joined by some volunteers every once and then, such as our sisters, or medical students from the American University, or foreign friends.

The clinic not only provided medical services to Bint Jbeil, but also to the border villages, including the villages controlled by Saad Haddad. Therefore its missions were multiple. It was a medical contact point, a communication point and a security point. Dalal was not satisfied with this role, and she insisted that she'd go to the front bunkers and position there, so we allowed her to do so during daytime. But she was not satisfied with this role either. It seemed that her ambition was greater. She joined the group of Martyr Kamal Adwan and went in the famous operation to the Palestinian coast, and she wrote in her will a great tribute to Martyr Saad Jaradat, the battalion and the student organization.

After the occupation of Maroun al-Ras, Israeli military intervention appeared to become a reality, and the issue was resolved by the operation of Dalal al-Moghraby. The front lines were completely silent and there

was no movement in the Zionist settlements. The inhabitants had been evacuated.

Around midnight on March 14, aerial bombardments and artillery began on our positions in Maroun al-Ras and Bint Jbeil, as well as on other sectors of the South. I happened to be invited to attend a joint command meeting in Saida on the day of the attack, in the presence of Colonel Fakhri Chakoura, a Central Operations representative. As I was on my way from Bint Jbeil to Saida, messages from Brother Rebhi in Maroun al-Ras started to arrive, indicating that for the first time, he was seeing clear progress of masses of Zionist military vehicles, and that the Zionists were moving from the rear gathering points to their line of deployment. When I arrived in Saida, I requested that the meeting be quick. I informed the command of the forces that the Israeli attack would occur in the same night or at dawn as the enemy would not openly deploy their vehicles unless they want to progress. I left the meeting at about 11 pm because the cables were accelerating, talking about the movement and the huge number of the Zionist forces, and when I almost reached the area of Borj Shamali, the heavy aerial bombardment began, together with the throwing of illuminating cartridges. I do not want to go into the details of the military action that took place in the area of Bint Jbeil, but I want to say that the young men fought fiercely in Maroun al-Ras and all the positions, and followed a clever plan to avoid the hostile shelling: an enemy would expect you to pull back when they bomb your site, we moved forward; In other words, in Maroun al-Ras, our men moved towards the Lebanese-Palestinian border, so no one was hurt in the hostile shelling. We even left the fortified positions of Bint Jbeil and just moved forward.

As a result, when the enemy ran over in Maroun al-Ras and entered our line, he found it empty. His soldiers started celebrating and dancing, our men shot them as they were celebrating. According to Israeli sources, the enemy admitted to the death of eight people in Maroun al-Ras itself, and acknowledged heavy casualties in Bint Jbeil. We had agreed on a regressive combat plan. This plan required us absorb the first shock and to remain in our positions as long as possible, then withdraw to another node, and then to a third node and so on. Then we'd move to a large front

of several combat groups to confront the enemy, who had somewhat progressed in the meantime and felt that the node was small, which made them rush in force, only to be surprised by a large knot confusing their progress. We arranged this way of fighting so that after Bint Jbeil there was a node in Beit-Yahun, then in Kunin, then several groups in Tibnin, then a node in Sultaniya, another in Shehabiya, and then a large front in Jwaya and in Abbasiya.

Our losses in Bint Jbeil were huge. Absorbing the shock cost us the martyrdom of most of the young men who were in locations like Masoud Hill and Shalaboun Hill. Among them were Martyr Hassan Sharara, Martyr Bashar Faour, Martyr Zeytoun Bazzi, Martyr Abu Khaled Shehaymi, Martyr Abu Wajih Andari. The burial places of these martyrs and their brothers were discovered after the liberation of the South in 2000, a monument was erected and a large celebration took place in Bint Jbeil in honor of their steadfastness and their fighting.

The battle of 1978 kept on until the last two points of our fight: Jwaya and Abbasiya. In the latter, the enemy committed a large-scale well-known massacre.²⁵ However, our fighting in Abbasiya and Jwaya convinced the Israelis that if they continued to advance to Tire and the camps, this would mean that fierce fighting would take place. Note that the battle from Bint Jbeil to Jwaya and Abbasiya did not last a day or two, it took eight days, and we and the brothers of the Central Sector were fighting in this segment under the leadership of Martyr Bilal, a clever and courageous leader. This plan prevented the arrival of the Zionists to the Litani, and thus the Tire-Saida road remained open, and the Palestinian camps remained out of the occupied area. Here I would like to mention the remarkable role of Martyr Ali Abu Tawq, who was in charge of the administration at the time and never failed to supply all the groups with weapons and ammunitions. We did not lose a single arms depot. In one of the places, in the orchards of Shibriha, the Israelis were 50 meters away from the weapons cache there, and despite that, Ali managed to transfer the entire cache. We did not lose a single piece of weapon, did not cut off contact with groups and did not lose supplies.

After the battle, the Zionist Chief of Staff Mordechai Gur held a press conference in which he said that “the units we encountered in Bint Jbeil and Maroun al-Ras were different from all the units we encountered previously”, and he mentioned something that he described as important, that they found in these sites educational leaflets and booklets with learned lessons from other experiences. He concluded that they were facing a different quality of fighters.

25) A single airstrike on a mosque in Abbasiyya killed 75 Lebanese civilians.



Top to bottom

Young men from Bint Jbeil who confronted the Israeli invasion 14–16 March 1978, in locations like Masoud Hill and Shalaboun Hill. The group was led by Martyr Hassan Sharara (front row, second from left). (Unknown photographer.)

Many of the local defenders from Bint Jbeils gave their lives in the unequal battle against the invading Israeli army 14–16 March 1978. The burial places were discovered in 2000, and a monument was erected in Bint Jbeil in honor of their steadfastness and their fighting. The text in Arabic: The martyrs from the heroic battles in the hills of Shalaboun and Masoud in 1978, who with their pure souls defended the land of Bint Jbeil. Soldiers from the blessed Islamic defense forces liberated their dead bodies from where the Israeli soldiers, unjust and with contempt, had buried them. – 29 May 2000 (Year of Liberation).

When the 1978 war ended, we redeployed along the coastline, and the UNIFIL came. We had fears that the troops of Saad Haddad would deploy in the same areas as the international forces, so we and the Central Sector infiltrated these areas. We were led by Martyr Bilal and the brigade of Martyr Abu Youssef el-Najjar was led by Martyr Azmi al- Zghayyar. We spread into the areas that the Zionists were leaving before the arrival of the UNIFIL and when these arrived in the region, they were in front of a "fait accompli": When they entered Deir Qanoun, they found out we had a base there, then they entered Qana, and it was the same there, and in Jwaya and Deirdaghayya.

Thus, we became a fait accompli, and it became inevitable to form a liaison committee between our forces and the UNIFIL. This committee was led by a brave officer of our brothers in the Palestine Liberation Army, Major Mohammad Timraz.

During this stage there was a kind of confrontation, as Saad Haddad's forces tried to infiltrate to some border areas such as Majdal Silm and Qabrikha, with support from the Zionists, to have Wadi al-Hujair under their control. In cooperation with the locals of these villages and their elders, we sent groups who lived there in the residents' homes and received full supply and support from them. At night, patrols were to go to Wadi al-Hujair and the border strip. We were moving in plainclothes and did not establish a fixed base. Every few days we used to move a few people in plainclothes from one house to another. In this way, we would not need cars or military vehicles that could be watched.

We were able to prevent any deployment of Saad Haddad's forces into the UNIFIL area throughout this period. We were able to maintain good relations with the officers and even cooperated with them to transport weapons and ammunition into the occupied territory. We carried out dozens of transport operations through the UNIFIL, and the Israelis discovered only one of them. Major Mohammad Timraz had a major role in arranging this in cooperation with Hamdi and Abu Hassan Qassem.

You had a moral code in the bases, and in your relationship with the people. Can you tell us more about this code?

The whole Fatah organization should work that way. We focused on good behaviour, what we call revolutionary rules of conduct, such as respect for the people, their customs and traditions, humility before them, and non-interference. We considered aggression against people to be an aggression against us. We had zero tolerance in this regard, even if we had to threaten to use force, or at least hint at force to prevent such acts. In every region we went, we started cleaning it from drug dealers, thieves and rogues, and such in-

cidents would quickly end. Transgression against the locals was strictly prohibited regardless of the perpetrator.

We sometimes threatened to use force against Fatah members, or other factions that assaulted the locals, or public property. We fought all attempts to bully the people. This created a strong relationship between the locals and us. In addition to a revolutionary code of conduct, our positive position towards the "Movement of the Dispossessed" (Amal), and our relationship with Sayyid Musa al-Sadr, the presence of a number of our brothers in Fatah in each region we went to, and our non-discrimination of the southern peoples based on affiliation, intellectual or family alignments were all helpful.

Like all other regions in Lebanon the South has its own characteristics. In all regions there are divisions, as in any society. There are conflicts and rivalry between families and political or partisan forces. Families and villages may change their allegiance from one faction to another and from one party to another. On this subject, we did not take stands: we knew that we had allies from the Palestinian factions and the Lebanese National Movement, but this did not mean that we had to be hostile towards the political opponents of these factions. For example, if Iraq engaged in a war against Iran, that would not mean that we would allow the Baath groups or the Arab Liberation Front (pro-Iraq) to clash with the pro-Iranian Shiite Islamists. We refused to be hostages of their stand. For us, Palestine was the central cause, and the conflict with the Zionist enemy and its agents was the main conflict, beyond ideological, partisan, or religious affiliations.

At that time, the Amal movement was a rising force in southern Lebanon. However, the parties of the National Movement, especially the Communist Party, considered the South as their main support base. They believed that the credit obtained by Amal came at their expense. This created a state of rivalry and conflict between the two sides that quickly turned into armed clashes in many areas.

In Bint Jbeil we initiated a dialogue with the Amal movement. It was an experiment that we went on to conduct in all regions of the South. We had previous experience with the Movement of the Dispossessed from its first training camp, when the trainers were from us. During the training, one of our brothers was martyred with a group of members of the Amal movement. During the eulogy, Imam Musa al-Sadr announced the birth of the Regiments of the Lebanese Resistance (Amal) as the military wing of the Movement of the Dispossessed.

In addition to the experience of Kfar Shuba and the common position with Imam Musa al-Sadr on many issues concerning the civil war, we opened a discus-

sion and dialogue with Dr. Mustafa Shamran, who became Minister of Defense in the government of Mehdi Bazargan in Iran. He was the head of the Amiliyyah Mihaniyyah²⁶ in Borj al-Shamali. Of course, there were many fears and concerns in the Amal movement on one hand, and in other movements, including Fatah, on the other. So we convinced Dr. Mustapha Shamran that they had to be present in the combat positions facing the border forces. In fact, the Amal movement started sending groups to join us in the area of Bint Jbeil. They started to have permanent groups there, and Dr. Mustafa Shamran himself came with these groups. This partially broke the tension that existed at that stage. During the 1978 invasion, the Amal movement fought the Zionist enemy bravely in Beit Lif and other areas.

At the same time, we were establishing relations with other influential actors, and foremost the father of Sayyid Mohamed Hussein Fadlallah, Sayyid Abdul Raouf Fadlallah. We visited him regularly at his house in Aynata with the chief of the municipality, the mayor, and parties from the national movement. There were no obstacles or objections to establishing such relations with all as long as this would serve social or civil stability, prevent any negative friction, and achieve steadfastness in the face of the enemy. Martyr Hassan Sharara and his brothers from the region had a great role in coordinating these contacts, in addition to his distinctive combat and leadership role.

We were at first successful. However, at a later stage, when the tension increased and the Iraqi-Iranian war broke out, and the influence of the Amal movement began to dominate, the tension led to armed clashes in 1980–1982. Palestinian factions were involved in these conflicts between the Amal movement and the factions of the National Movement. Our position was firm against those who committed abuses, no matter to whom they belonged. For example, in the area of Kafr Tibnit, members of the Amal movement killed two members of the Arab Socialist Action Party, on their way to their positions in Arnoun.

We took a firm stand, declaring that our fight was against the Zionist enemy, and that such acts were prohibited. We convinced the Amal movement to hand over the two people who killed, to have them imprisoned and brought to trial.

In other areas, however, there were attacks and shelling of villages. For example, if a village was considered to be affiliated with the Amal movement, it could be hit by rockets and mortars. To maintain our decisive position, we were intervening even if the village concerned was outside the area under our control. We would dispatch a force to stop the infighting. But this unfortunately changed our role.

26) Arabic : vocational school

We had at that time the duty of holding the position in the Beaufort castle, Kafr Tibnit and Horsh Nabi Taher, because the main confrontation was with the forces of Saad Haddad and the Zionist enemy.

But half of the battalion became preoccupied with the disengagement in Ansar, Zeffa, Marwaniya and Sarafand. If there was a problem or tension in the region, we had to go and solve it.²⁷ It was Mu'in, Marwan or Abu al-Fath who would go and contribute to solving the existing problem even if it was outside our military liability, and this would take a lot of energy and effort. For example, we had a full brigade in charge of protecting the rear Castle line, which was located on the bridge of Qa'qaiyah, Jibshît and Zawtar. We expected that the Israeli attack would not come across the Khardali Bridge but would flow around the UNIFIL forces and rush through Qa'qaiyah. But we had to transfer this platoon to resolve the clashes in Ansar, enabling the enemy to cross the Qa'qaiyah Bridge easily. The Israelis collided with the platoon only when it left Ansar just after their invasion, at the entrances of the village of Jibshît.

Do you mean that the concept of a “safe base” was forgotten in southern Lebanon?

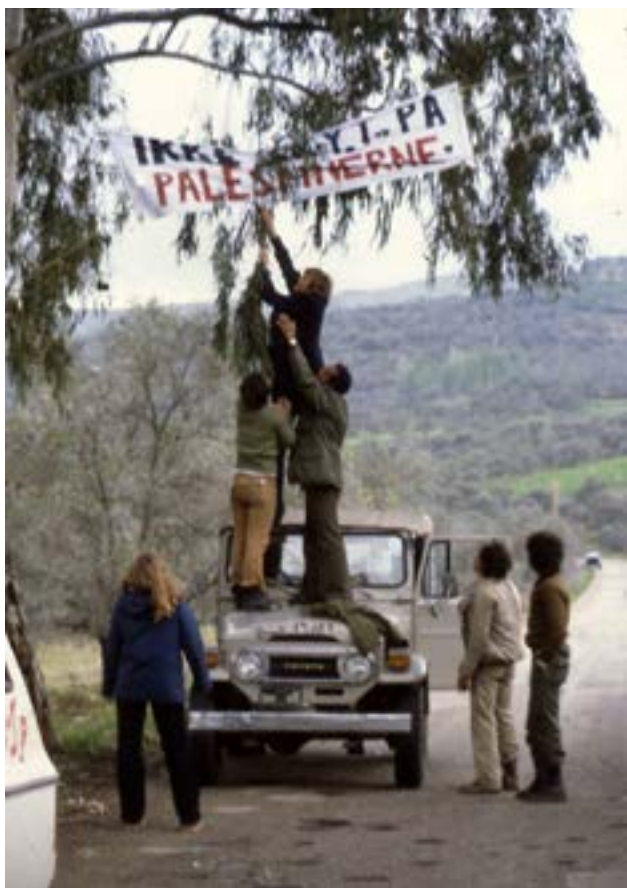
I think it was close to being forgotten. We were heading in that direction, and we warned the Palestinian leadership more than once that we were riding an unsafe road. You cannot live in an environment that may gradually turn unfriendly due to some bad practices from your side, and due to the repercussions of the Lebanese, Arab and international situation.

Martyr Marwan Kayali was forced to leave the fourth conference of Fatah, held in Syria, to stop clashes that broke out in Zeffa and Marwaniya. The reason was that an officer who was the deputy commander of a battalion in Fatah, sympathized with one of the Lebanese groups and decided to attack the villages in the absence of most of the officials at the conference. Abu al-Fath and Khaled and Hussam had moved a force from the battalion to stop the clash by force, and Marwan returned to the conference after the clashes stopped. He and Abu Ammar received a report on the situation, and Abu Ammar sanctioned the officer.

This incident was not isolated from its context. Some factions of the National Movement believed that they could, with the help of some Palestinian factions stop the growth of Amal and the rising Shiite tide. The Iran–Iraq war spilled over on Lebanon through clashes, assassinations and tensions in daily relations. The Palestinian leadership, headed by Abu Ammar, often

27) The brigade tried to go between when there was tension between groups from Amal and from parties in the National Movement.

stood helpless and could not act. Sometimes I had the feeling that he was turning a blind eye to certain incidents, hoping that some of his allies were able to achieve partial progress. Then within hours he would make all his efforts to stop the spread of the fire and encircle it. The Palestinian leadership was fully aware of its interest in keeping the South out of internal fighting, but I think they were not satisfied with the change in the political mood in southern Lebanon and feared the increasing influence of Syria and Iran. Neither were they satisfied with the decline in their status in Lebanon as a strong card in any political process expected. With each internal clash, their room for maneuver had narrowed to the point that they could no longer move on secondary roads. They started to avoid these roads, except for battalion's cars, to avoid the dangers of arrest and detention. Our mission turned into extinguishing fires and encircling them, but we were unable to prevent them from erupting. The general popular mood



PLO-soldiers helping the Norwegian medical team in March-April, 1979, put up their message to the Norwegian soldiers travelling southwards to Norbatt headquarters in Ebel es-Saqi. The message (in Norwegian) is simple: "Don't shoot the Palestinians." On March 19, 1978, the UN Security Council had adopted resolutions 425 and 426 calling upon Israel to withdraw from all Lebanese territory. The UNSC also decided to establish the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The first Norwegian contingent started to arrive on March 2, 1978. (Photo by Magne Olsen.)

was beginning to change. But then 1982 war started and redefined the equations.

Where did you go after the 1978 invasion?

We took position in the area of Qasimiya Zerariya, and we were present behind the UNIFIL in Deir Qanoun, Abbassiya, Deirdaghaya and Majdal Silm. During this period we also resumed the training of the battalion and established a permanent training camp that absorbed hundreds of fighters, and received a large number of new volunteers. The battalion became stronger than before, despite the martyrdom of more than 30 brothers and cadres in the war of 1978.

At a later stage, the military units were redeployed. We were responsible for protecting the coastal road from Qasimiya to Zahrani. Before we took this task, the Zionists had carried out ambushes on the coastal road. Therefore, from our arrival, we did not have any fixed positions. Our brothers in Kuwait sent us a quantity of sleeping bags and we distributed them to the fighters. At daytime we would spread over the highlands overlooking the coastal road, and at night the machine guns were in position on the highlands, while other units were deployed on the beach at potential landing sites. We were never surprised by a landing operation of the Zionists because we had a very high level of caution and preparedness. No single point was ever reported against us in an area we were responsible for. We clashed with them once. They were carrying out a landing operation on the coast, but our people arrived at the same time. There was a clash from close range, and the enemy retreated immediately. Two of our fighters, Samir Salem and Nazmi Hijazi, were martyred, and the enemy suffered severe casualties. When we combed the beach, we found dozens of bloodstained bandages, as well as the remains of a rubber boat that had been destroyed.

Another time, we heard explosions at a PFLP-General Command base in the Sarafand area. We rushed to the site and found a number of martyrs. The circumstances were dubious, and the General Command opened an investigation revealing the complicity of one of its officials, who had put the base fighters to sleep with sleeping pills. This was a security operation aimed at an easy victory. It was repeated in the Nabatiyeh area, where the Israelis raided a house on the outskirts of the village Kfour and killed four members of the Arab Liberation Front. We were surprised when we discovered that these four were put in this place on the same night as the raid. It became clear that there was infiltration.

The enemy did not succeed in carrying out any raid or ambush in any segment under our responsibility, but this taught us the lesson that the enemy does not attack you when you are alert and ready. They rather resort to other means, such as the use of their huge

firepower to bombard with aircraft, artillery, and rockets, or may put a car bomb near one of your sites, as happened with us in the Nabatiyeh area.

In 1980–1982, the enemy resorted to the use of booby-trapped cars, placing them in either crowded places or near certain premises. This method was repeated in Beirut more than once. One was placed in front of the Palestinian Planning Center where a number of brothers and sisters were injured, including Dr. Mahjoub, and my wife, who was passing by. The Divine Providence intervened to save Brother Abu Fadi, the director of the center, because Brother Adel Abdul Mahdi had paid him a visit at his house in the morning, which resulted in the car exploding minutes before he arrived to the center.

The enemy managed again to put a car near the headquarters of the forces of Qastal in Saida, and their aircraft bombarded the administrative headquarters of the battalion on the coast in Aytaniya, in response to an operation in the occupied territory. Our losses in Aytaniya were limited to the destruction of the battalion's mobile library, which ended up as thousands of papers and hundreds of books scattered among orange trees.

One day we received information from inside the border strip²⁸ that the enemy and their agents were setting up a booby-trapped car near the busy Monday market in the city of Nabatiyeh. On this day, hundreds of people from the region pour into Nabatiyeh for sale and purchase. It was on November 21, 1980. We placed a checkpoint on the Nabatiyeh- Qa'qaiyah road under the command of Brother Abu Ahmad of the Central Security, and we informed the check-point of the Lebanese Arab Army stationed on the Qa'qaiyah Bridge.

The command site of the battalion consisted of two buildings facing each other, one for the reception of guests and visitors and the second for administrative transactions. At noon, a delegation from the Popular Committees and Associations came together with comrades Maan Bashour and Bshara Merhej. An Egyptian delegation was also present with comrade Mohammed Taymour. Only Abu al-Khal and Rashid, who had received the delegation, were at the headquarters. At that moment, a pick-up broke down in the street between the two buildings, and because we raised our fighters to serve the masses, the transport officer Abu Yassin and one of the technicians started to check the car and found that one of its pieces needed to be replaced. The driver went to fetch the required piece, while Abu al-Khaleel decided to move the car away from the headquarters. At the same time Abu al-Fath arrived to meet the guests. A few minutes later, a huge blast thundered, causing a 10-meter large excavation, and destroying a

concrete wall. But neither of us nor our guests were hurt, as the car had been moved away at the right time. It was a particularly good lesson for us. We estimated that this car was in response to an operation carried out in the West Bank.

Did the battalion have political and social activities?

Yes, we talked and had relations with all the social and political groups or individuals, and every night we had more than one occasion to socialize in the various villages. This was a collective activity in which all the cadres participated. In every place we were, we took the initiative in meeting and communicating with the various cultural, social, and religious personalities and the youth. We considered ourselves as part of this social fabric, and it was our duty to preserve it and promote it, in addition to take care of the security, preventing any aggression or transgression against the people, building good relations with them, and participating in their events. We also took care of the medical side because the South was deprived of the simplest forms of medical care. We established a clinic in Bint Jbeil, and Dr. Ezzat al-Asmar, one of our brothers in Germany, volunteered to join through the medical services of Fatah. He was preceded by Dr. Khaled from France, Sister Bahia, Sister Dalal al-Moghraby and Brother Aqba. There was a dental clinic and a dispensary in Nabatiyeh. The most prominent achievement was transforming an abandoned hospital in Nabatiyeh into a field hospital with the help of the Red Crescent. This was when we established our special relationship with Dr. Giannou, who managed the hospital efficiently, and later moved with us to Tripoli and then to Shatila with Martyr Ali Abu Tawq.

Were there ethical boundaries within these bases?

Of course, and we were strict on two levels: first in the relationship with the people surrounding us, and secondly in the rules of the revolutionary code of conduct. Assaulting the people, their property and their security was forbidden, not only for ourselves but for everyone. We imposed an atmosphere of security and tranquility in the hearts of people wherever we would be. I remember that we were in an orange grove on the coast, and a few days later the owner of the orchard came and was surprised that its fruit had not been touched, although our tents were set among the trees, and the orange fruits were dangling from the trees without being picked; We expected to be asked to leave and were ready to carry out his eventual request. Some had had bad experiences in this area. But we were surprised that he asked us to stay. We did not take a single orange without the owner's permission, and he said it publicly. The owners of orchards used to give us some of their fruits. I do not remember that

28) The enclave controlled by Haddad.

any of us took fruit to his home. We strongly fought the tendency to feel superior to the people, and we saw ourselves as its soldiers and its servants.

We were applying and developing the rules of the revolutionary code of conduct. We focused on personal development, building a Fedayeen fighter who respects his people and appreciates its customs and traditions. Experience taught us that a procedural flaw may hide a security flaw. He who sells himself to the enemy will follow his whims and desires and will not be able to treat his colleagues according to a revolutionary code of conduct. Of course, we distinguished between this and those who came to our ranks with some bad habits from their past. It was our pledge to improve, educate and train, and this was a continuous process in our ranks.

Inside the bases, playing cards was forbidden. Some hostile raids occurred on other units while the fighters were playing cards. The only game allowed was chess. Alcoholic beverage was forbidden, and girls were taboo, but we did care for our fighters to get married and we gave them every possible help in this area. In fact, there was no time for frivolities inside the bases. Everyone was busy either in fortification works or in training, in community service, in education or in combat missions. And let us not forget to mention the entertainment aspect of purposeful chatting evenings, an additional occasion to strengthen the motivation.

This was inside the battalion, but would not the fighters take leaves?

Of course, they needed time to rest away from the battles and the shelling. We even had to pressure some to take leave and go rest a bit so that they could be more efficient when they returned. But this required implementation of a system, a mission that was carried out by Martyr Ali Abu Tawq. Anyone married, whose family resided in Lebanon or Syria, would go home, and find that the catering car preceded him and left provisions in kind in the house to compensate for the low salary. As for single men, they would usually go to Beirut where we rented a house in the Arab University area for fighters who did not have parents, like the young people from Palestine. They were not allowed to sleep in hotels or at friends' places. There was an officer – previously injured – overseeing the house, which included a storage room for individual weapons to use when needed, and about 30 beds. If you wanted to go to the cinema, it meant that at 9:30 pm you had to be home. This was because we did not want you to go to a bar or to suspicious places. Having brothers taking leaves in groups close to each other was simplifying our task and turned the monitoring into self-control. So, it was easy to adjust any deviance, to assess it and follow up on it.

What if someone wanted to drink wine at lunch during their leave?

It was not recommended or acceptable. Even before the action of the battalion and student organization, when we became involved in the movement, these practices stopped. Those who drank either quit or abstained from drinking in public places. This applied mainly to the officers. Our standards were strict: those who wanted to do public work must adhere to our rules. We did consider the individual cases, but we were committed to care, assess, debate, and to practice criticism and self-criticism.

Did you have libraries? Were there lectures?

We had a mobile library in a Mercedes truck that went to the bases to lend books. We had wall posts in the bases and dozens of cartoon posters written by the fighters, because we were concerned with the process of education, review, criticism, self-criticism, and awareness of the political and military situation. The book "Revolutionary ideas in the practice of fighting," is based on stories that each of us had actually lived and was written by fighters inspired by their field experience. We compiled these stories. Brother Abu Fadi edited them, and we published the book on behalf of Martyrs Saad and Abu Khaled George, in their honor and in appreciation for their pioneering role. The book included dozens of topics in methods of work, organization, self-reform, approaches and politics. A quick look at the book's table of contents shows how important it was to revolutionary education, as it includes titles such as: "What are our true thoughts"; "Dedicating our lives for the people and the Revolution"; "The ethical position"; "Daring to struggle against mistakes and shortcomings"; "Getting rid of bad habits"; "Let us break the trend of discontent"; "The tendency to give lessons and tutelage"; "Against the search for temperamental harmony"; "Two lines in the face of responsibility"; "Learning from simple things and from those who put us in charge"; "Raising tolerance and patience and addressing the problem of delayed shift replacement"; "Telling the event as it is, without exaggeration"; "The weapon to fight the enemy"; "Overcome difficulties"; "We go where the hardest missions are"; "Facing the fall of martyrs"; "Against the policy of attack versus attack"; "Political line and cohesion"; "Weapon is not the decisive factor"; "Do not underestimate the enemy tactically"; "To apply our ideas to reality"; "Every conflict is tortuous"; "Every action has a main purpose"; "War has its laws and politics has its laws"; "Horizontal action and focus"; "Follow-up and non-neglect"; "Seeking the fast gain"; "Every horse can fall"; "Let us care about the study"; "How do we conduct an assessment"; "Clarifying the mission".

A look at these topics illustrates part of the educational program associated with practice. For example, the title “The fighter should not neglect the care of his wounds” took its origin in the case of Martyr Ali Abu Tawq, who was wounded for the first time, and did not give it time to heal. Instead, he went to the front positions on crutches, to help his comrades fill sandbags, and then got injured again in the same foot that was in the cast, and then suffered a permanent limp. Circumstances led him to be injured a third time in Nabatiyeh. He was hospitalized for only a few days then returned to his position long before his new wound was healed. The matter was discussed in the brigade of Martyr Abu Khaled at its weekly meeting, and they wrote a letter to Martyr Ali that his body was the property of the Revolution and the people and that he should not neglect his wounds.

Each platoon had its daily program: the morning line and guidance from the platoon commander. This was done even in front positions. Then regular meetings at various levels ranging from the group till the battalion leadership, also at the level of the platoon and the brigade. Even the group in the front line would be sent a new shift from other groups after the end of their own meeting, so that the meetings could be held in a safe place. These meetings were not formal, but were an opportunity for education and self-criticism, studying the political and military situation and reviewing the tasks.

The periodical assessment of the situation was something that distinguished us, and we built a lot of our positions on it. We had the ability to predict the timing and range of the enemy’s movement. We were so obsessed with this that a cute story spread in our ranks after the battalion leadership had been exposed to an air raid. The essence of the story was that the

political commissioner of the battalion had estimated that the enemy was not likely to carry out any offensive because they were unable to obtain America’s green light. The US–Zionist relations were strained by some differences between Reagan and Begin. Of course, this estimate was about the prospect of a large-scale operation, or invasion, and was not referring to limited operations.

But the fact is, that at the same moment that this analysis was presented, we were attacked by Zionist aircrafts following an operation inside the occupied territory carried out by one of the brothers who trained in our ranks. As he was lying on the ground to take shelter from the raid, Martyr Marwan yelled in his authentic Beiruti accent, denouncing the analysis. But the political commissioner answered him: “If you want my opinion, my analysis is well founded. It’s not my fault that Begin is a fool who doesn’t understand anything about politics”.

Were the rules of behavior intended to build a model behavior and set an example among people, or were they kept within the battalion?

There is no doubt that it reflected on the surrounding society, and the masses are usually very good at distinguishing and evaluating. There was a consensus among people that our behavior was a different experience, and over time our ability to influence the surrounding environment was greater. This was evident among the local people of influence. When they asked Brother Abu Ammar to send the battalion to their regions, he would repeatedly answer that he had one and only one Jarmaq battalion. I believe that our revolutionary code of behavior and our political line were decisive for their appreciation of the battalion.

OPENNESS TO ISLAM. THE INVASION OF 1982

The rise of Shiite Islam. The restriction of the Palestinian presence. The moving to the Nabatiyeh area. The fortification of Beaufort Castle. Fighting against Israeli incursions. The battle of Beaufort Castle. Withdrawal and fighting in Mount Lebanon. The capture of Israeli soldiers.

Between the two invasions, the Islamisation movement started and you opened up to Islam. Shiite Islam began to rise at the same time as the Palestinian presence in southern Lebanon started to decline. Do you not find an irony in this?

The Islamic Revolution in Iran opened our eyes to something new: the popular theory at the time was that Islamists, or people who believed in political Islam, represented a reactionary trend. But the Islamic Revolution in Iran confirmed that there was a great potential for Islam to be revolutionary and mobilize energies and efforts, turn into progressive work, and contribute to the process of liberation.

Our assessment was that we were facing a major change in the region: The Shah had chosen to become an ally of Israel and an Islamic revolution took place. The concept of militant, progressive or revolutionary Islam contributed to a change in the conflict with the Zionist enemy and America in the region. From our side, there had been an interest in Islam and Islamic thought, especially because the people around us in southern Lebanon was a Muslim Shii'ah society that was directly influenced by the Iranian experience.

On the practical level, I did not feel that anything had changed fundamentally in the battalion or in the order of our work in general, because the prevailing values remained the same and did not change. Some Muslim brothers may individually have progressed more than others in faith and performance of rituals, especially because subjects such as Marxism or Maoism were not on the table inside the battalion. The nature of our work made all things go in a practical direction, to such an extent that when we held a leadership meeting, Ali Abu Tawq would be so tired that he would fall asleep during the meeting.

There were probably more profound debates in Beirut, in the countryside and among young people at the universities, than in the bases. Some of the fighters around us had already been through such a debate about Marxism and Islam. The fact remains that it did not affect the nature of the internal relations between us, nor the nature of missions, nor the nature of the work of the movement in general, especially in the occupied territory. After 1984-1985, things began to take on different directions. My opinion was that a real revolutionary project in our country that ignored the popular Islamic culture and the great asset that political Islam represent in people and did not see it as an

essential instrument of incitement, struggle and jihad, could not succeed. In other words, I was always in line with the movement. The Saraya al Jihad²⁹ project was also within this line, focusing on Palestine and mobilizing all forces to fight the enemy.

How did this affect the battalion?

As a battalion, the issue was that the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran was considered a new fighting potential that could extend the life of the Revolution and the Palestinian struggle, as it would hasten the victory and compensate for the loss of Egypt after Sadat went to the Knesset and signed the Egyptian Israeli treaty. Our value system was not different and did not change, as it was basically close to the Arab-Islamic culture. Several publications released by the organization were referring to this in periods prior to the Islamic tide. In addition, our practical position was to build the broadest front for the Resistance, and unite the people with all its religious, doctrinal, and political components.

There was in general, and long before the Islamic Revolution, an atmosphere of fasting and worship. If for any reason there was a breaker, he would refrain from taking breakfast in front those who fasted, out of respect for them. I did not feel that anything had changed. Those among us who would not fast would not proclaim it. Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, there were militants praying in mosques. After the Revolution, their numbers may have increased.

Often one detachment in the battalion would all go to the nearby mosque in a mixture of faith and commitment to the line of the people and the line of the masses. Islam influenced our ideas about the enormous potential energies that could be mobilized to join the Revolution, strengthen it, and get it closer to the moment of victory.

What was the background for your move to the Nabatiyeh area and Beaufort Castle?

We were stationed on the coastal area when the Zionist enemy launched a massive operation targeting the positions of the Beit al-Maqdes brigade in the Nabatiyeh area, including Arnoun, Beaufort Castle, Kafr Tibnit, and Nabi Taher groves on the night of August 19, 1980.

29) Saraaya al-Jihad al-Islami (brigades of Islamic Jihad)

Around 2:00 am, the commander of the forces, Hajj Ismaïl, requested that a force from the Jarmaq battalion be moved to the area of Nabatiyeh, to support the brigade of Beit al-Maqdes. A force moved, led by Jihad, who was helped by Martyrs Hani Kamal and Râssim. Their move was cautious in anticipation of enemy ambushes, air strikes or artillery on the road. When the force arrived at the entrances of Nabatiyeh at dawn, it was clear that the enemy began to withdraw after having showered Nabatiyeh with dozens of rockets per minute. Jihad kept the force outside the city and went to meet the commander of the Beit al-Maqdes Brigade to receive instructions on the deployment of his force. The situation was still unclear. The brigade commander, Alaa, suggested that they go together to the front positions and decide how to organize the re-deployment.

The enemy had not been able to enter the Castle, but arrived at its doors, and the losses of Beit al-Maqdes brigade were as large as 29 martyrs.

The commander of Qastal forces, Hajj Ismaïl, arrived at the place, and was grieving for what had happened, despite the losses in the ranks of the enemy. Our joined forces took place in all the positions of Beit al-Maqdes, in the Castle, in Arnoun, Nabi Taher grove and Kafr Tibnit, and we spread in the area in anticipation of air raids or artillery shelling from the enemy.

During Abu Ammar's visit to the area, air raids resumed, causing the martyrdom of two of our fighters who had not followed Râssim's (Yaqûb Sammûr) instructions to deploy around the Castle.

By evening, al-Jarmaq had completed its transfer to the Nabatiyeh area, which was now its responsibility. The castle was almost completely destroyed, and it was impossible to stay inside its remains, while the rest of the positions were completely unequipped with trenches or fortifications. We were in the open, facing the enemy machine with all its strength. At the same time, Nabatiyeh town was facing loss of security, and there were many gangs and criminal groups.

We had to move immediately on both fronts. We cleaned up the city, which became safe again. Then, led by Ali Abu Tawq, we started equipping and fortifying our military positions. We started a large and continuous work that did not stop for one single day over two full years.

How was fortification done?

It was a collective workshop centered around Ali Abu Tawq. First it was necessary to find shelters for the fighters and protect them from non-stop artillery shelling. We resorted to the central workshop and made ready-to-mount steel structures that we buried in the ground. We took thousands of bags of sand that the sisters from universities and secondary schools and camps in Beirut and Saida packaged from the sea-shore. The students at the Engineering school of the American University retrieved an old structural plan of the Beaufort Castle in the library of the university, enabling us to learn its secrets and find out in which places and directions we could dig down, despite the Zionist destruction. They supervised the ongoing digging and fortification operations day and night. Dozens of volunteers from various regions participated, including a permanent group from the bodyguard of Abu Ammar. We started digging trenches connected to the steel structures. Then we built two reinforced bunkers and began digging a tunnel under Beaufort to protect ourselves from aerial bombardments.

In the Beaufort Castle there was a site that we called "the airport", a place that included a helicopter landing pad. It was an open site indeed, the highest location in the castle. To be able to take position there, we had to dig a network of interconnected trenches and provide them with a roof so that, if Israelis were to throw fragmentation grenades, people in the trenches would be protected from the fragments. When we went out to dig in this "airport" the enemy could monitor our movements from the settlement of Metula. The men found a way: they placed an empty container beside the cement jib. When the enemy fired their rockets,



Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat) visiting the brigade during the fortification of Beaufort Castle 1980–82. Muin Taher to the left of AA. (Unknown photographer.)

the men could hear the sound of the launching and count the seconds between the firing of the rocket and its strike. It usually required 30 to 40 seconds, so one of the fighters would jump to fill the container with cement, and spread it on the roof before returning to the trench to take shelter. In this manner, we roofed all the trenches there with cement.

We remained stationed in our positions and in other locations day and night, combining the combat duty to defend our positions with the tasks of reinforcement and digging, even under bomb shelling. So the fighters wrote at the entrance to the Castle: "Built by Beaufort, liberated by Saladin and transformed by Ali Abu Tawq."

The castle witnessed the fiercest clashes during the 1982 war. The battles raged in every trench and every corner. They were led by a Yemeni militant named Abdul Qâdir al-Kahlâni. He and his men were all killed in the face-to-face clash that lasted several hours. The Zionist Channel Ten, as well as several other Zionist medias, published films and reports showing the violence of the fighting that took place. They described the size of the fortifications, which surprised the enemy. This bears witness to the Arab and the Palestinian fighters for their courage, their daring and their persistence, staying in the battle until martyrdom.

Do you want to expand further on the Nabatiyeh phase?

In Nabatiyeh, the nature of the mission necessitated a different armament and made us think about how to provide local firepower in a large scale and in a flexible way at the same time. We got part of the armament through the forces of Qastal, and during a visit of the chief Commander Abu-Ammar to the Castle, a brave fighter named Abu-Fuad complained about the lack of weapons. He pointed to some sites that needed heavy machine guns and complained about the poor quality of the military clothes, and how fast they would tear apart during the intensive works of excavation and reinforcement. Other units had received military clothing from Algeria. And with great courage, the fighter said to Brother Abu Ammar, "So Force 17³⁰ are Fedayeen and we are not Fedayeen?" The deputy commander of the forces, Abdel Aziz, tried to silence him, but I intervened and asked him to keep talking, because Brother Abu Ammar liked to listen to what was going on in the minds of his sons. Brother Abu Ammar patted the fighter on the shoulder and shared the last Ifâtâr of Ramadan with the men in the Castle without any prior arrangement for it. Around midnight, a large truck from Force 17, loaded with Algerian green Fotek clothing and two 14.5-mm submachine guns arrived

with instructions from Abu Ammar to distribute them to the fighters before dawn.

We had to put in place an operation plan that would take into account the various possibilities. We found ourselves facing three risks at the military level: The first and most urgent was the non-stop artillery and air raids against our positions, the enemy did not give us a single chance to rest. So, we had to equip our sites to provide the capacity to withstand and to reduce our potential losses, while developing our firepower to respond to it.

The second was to confront the enemy's "special operations": attempts to sneak into our positions, or to repeat a previous attack on our front line, or on our back positions. We laid out a detailed plan to confront this possibility and planted several minefields from the Khardali Bridge to Kafr Tibnit. We would prepare to ambush at night on the possible axes of the enemy's progress. The support unit spread its machine guns during the day in different positions to counter enemy aircraft. As for the night, it would rush to the axis Shawkîn-Zawtar to protect the background of this axis and prevent any attempt to land on it or surround it. We learned a lesson from our experience on the coast and applied it in Nabatiyeh: the enemy does not attack an alert position.

The third eventuality was that the enemy would advance and occupy the entire region. There were two possible avenues: The first was across the small castle Deir Mimeis in the direction of the Khardali Bridge up to Kafr Tibnit. The second was through the area of the UNIFIL from the region of Taybeh in the direction of the Qa'qaiyah Bridge up towards Jibshit, and then rush to Nabatiyeh and across the Zawtar plain to Arnoun and the Citadel and Kafr Tibnit.

Our assessment was based on the second eventuality. In a comprehensive war involving all of southern Lebanon, nothing would prevent the enemy from invading the areas of the UNIFIL. They would not show any resistance to the progress of the enemy. In that case, the Khardali Bridge would be a minor axis for the attack. But if the action was limited to targeting our sites in the Nabatiyeh area only, the Khardali axis would be the main focus of the attack, with the landing of the enemy forces behind our positions in Zawtar plain. We considered these possibilities and set up an anti-tank squad at the top of the Qa'qaiyah Bridge, where the checkpoint of the Arab Army of Lebanon was stationed. The task of this squad was to confront the enemy forces before they could cross the bridge, and try to blast them to impede their progress for as long as possible.

We were convinced that the battle would start at that point. But several weeks before the invasion,

30) Force 17. Special unit serving Abu Ammar

clashes broke out between the Amal movement and the Communist Party in the town of Ansar, involving mortar shells. We were asked to intervene and stop it. There were fingers playing in secret, as some of the skirmishes continued even after we arrived in the town and imposed a cease-fire between the parties. From time to time, we had to crack down on attempts to repeat the clashes and infiltrate gunmen into the town, and this drained the support unit's efforts for weeks. Finally, the calm prevailed in the town, even though in a state of constant tension, so we withdrew a large part of the force to return to its original duty of protecting the frontline background. But at the insistence of the locals, and out of fear of renewed clashes, we had to keep a mobile squad in town equipped with 75 mm guns.

So we lost our position in Qa'qaiyah, and we lost the possibility of an early response to the progress of the enemy. When the invasion began, this squad was in the town of Ansar and immediately moved towards al-Qa'qaiyah. However, it clashed with enemy forces halfway through the entrances to the town of Jibshit.

On the political level, we continued our efforts to extinguish fires, but we were unable to prevent them from igniting. Martyr Hasan Badr al- Din in Nabatiyeh carried out the same role as Martyr Hassan Sharara in Bint Jbeil in terms of contact with the locals, the stakeholders, and the political forces. The house of Martyr Hassan was a warm nest for us, and with him, relations grew and developed with the Martyr Sheikh Ragheb Harb and with a large group of those called during that period "the pilgrims". Most of them later became the founders of Hezbollah. Hassan was martyred at the gates of the village of Jibshit on June 6, 1982.

How were the battles during the invasion of 1982?

On June 3, 1982, a group belonging to Abu Nidal tried to assassinate the Israeli ambassador in London and inflicted serious wounds. The Zionist enemy exploited the incident as an excuse to wage war in Lebanon. It had become obvious, throughout the preceding period, that preparations were under way for a large-scale war in Lebanon. Some, including Brother Abu Ammar, called it the "Accordion War", meaning the arrival of the Zionist forces in Beirut in coordination with the Christian Lebanese Front.

On the morning of June 4, the enemy began an aerial, artillery and missile bombardment that included all of Lebanon, even reaching Beirut. For two full days, the shelling of our positions in Nabatiyeh, Kafr Tabnit, al-Horsh and Qal'at al-Shaqif (the Castle) lasted day and night and did not stop for a single moment. Despite the ferocity of the shelling, none of our

fighters died. On the morning of June 6, the fighters were able to shoot down a Sky Hawk aircraft as it was preparing to raid the Castle. The plane fell in the Kafr Tibnit area. Residents rushed towards the pilot, who landed in parachute and they would almost have killed him without the swift intervention of Martyr Ali Abu Tawq. The pilot, named Aaron Abik'azi, was captured, but Ali realized the enormity of the task he was entrusted with. He immediately and without hesitation moved the pilot to Beirut where he handed him over to the military security. The fighters rejoiced and hoped that their brothers, heroes from operations inside Israel, as well as other prisoners would be released and be among us soon. Unfortunately, the pilot was liberated as part of a deal for PLO to get out of Beirut.

On the morning of June 6, the hostile shelling reached its peak, and we could no longer count missiles, rockets and air raids on the outposts. At noon, reports came from the Beaufort Castle on the progress of large enemy forces through the area of Taybeh, who was under the control of the UNIFIL, and on their fast move through those areas. At the same time, the enemy also rushed through the UNIFIL forces in the direction of Tire and its camps where there was a confrontation between their forces and the militia units, the Martyr Abu Yusuf Najjar battalion led by Martyr Azmi al-Zghayyar, and the battalion of the central sector led by Martyr Bilal, both martyred during that war. It became clear that the enemy had invaded the entire area of the UNIFIL and proceeded to advance towards our positions. The UNIFIL did not resist or object in any way.

At this moment we moved the group stationed in Ansar in the direction of Qa'qaiyah, but it clashed with the enemy forces on the outskirts of the town of Jibshit. It was an uneven battle between three cars loaded with 75 mm anti-armor guns, a car simply equipped with a machine gun of 14.5 mm and an enemy force equal to a fully armed regiment. Our fighters managed to destroy three tanks and two soldiers' transporters. Our cars were destroyed. A brother named Saleh el-Bahreyni was killed. About 14 fighters were wounded and taken to the hospital in Nabatiyeh.

What about the Beaufort Castle, Qal'at el Shaqif?

Fighting in all locations of Nabatiyeh, Arnoun, al-Horsh and Kafr Tebnit was about fighting in and around the Castle. The battle was comprehensive, the enemy's attack was wide, and included all the axes. Our combat plan was based on the ability of all our sites to support each other by fire and through direct engagement with the enemy. The castle had three main sites, each equipped with a group of the battalion: The first group was positioned east of the Castle in the "airport" area.



Beaufort Castle, 1982. (Photo by David King, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/david5king/1150710679>)

Entrance to the exhibition in Beaufort Castle, November 2019. The Israelis and SLA (South Lebanon Army) occupied the area in 1982 and stayed there until the end of the occupation in 2000. As long as renovation is still ongoing, its main attraction is the view reaching as far as Israel and the Golan Heights. (Photo by Ebba Wergeland.)



Beaufort Castle on top of the steep southern slope, November 2019. The castle was left in a state of disrepair when the Israeli forces abandoned it in 2000. In the Crusader period the castle, located on a ridge overlooking the Litani River at a height of 670 m above sea level, was an important strongpoint in the hinterland of Sidon and Tyre. With the help of the Kuwait Fund for Economic Development, a \$3 million project to renovate the castle was initiated. Source: *Daily Star*, August 10, 2010. (Photo by Ebba Wergeland.)



It was led by the Yemeni martyr, Abdul Qader al-Kahlani, who, along with all of his group members, was killed in a fierce battle, taking place from a ditch to another, inside trenches, through battles from a distance of no more than one meter, and even through hand clashes at times.

That was when the killing of Johnny Harnik, took place. He was one of the commanders of the Golani battalions, and commander of the attack. The enemy suffered heavy losses. Taking control of this site took them more than twelve hours of continuous fighting, let alone two days of preliminary bombing. The second group in the center led by Saad, clashed with the enemy forces advancing from Arnoun. They lost a 14.5 mm machine gun, destroyed by a direct hit from a tank shell; the third group west of the castle was led by Martyr Râssim (Yacoub Sammour), the commander of the castle, who was martyred there. In each group there were approximately seven or eight individuals.

How did the fighting take place in the Citadel?

The attack began at noon and the first wave was broken in the Zawtar plain and at the gates of Arnoun, where the attack commander Moshe Kaplinsky got injured. The second wave took place after the Golani forces were mobilized to support the paratroopers and reached no more than the midpoint between the Castle and Arnoun. The third wave started when Johnny Harnik decided to climb the high ground on foot, leaving behind his tanks and armored vehicles. Those were an easy target for our fighters and became a cemetery for the enemy soldiers. This attack failed as Harnik himself was killed in front of the first trench around the evening hours. The fourth wave was at 11 pm, led by Lieutenant Colonel Dov, and at that time Râssim and Saad requested that the Qal'ah (the Citadel) itself be shelled, as enemy tanks and armored vehicles had gathered at the gates after all the fighters at the eastern site (the "airport") were martyred. Our rockets launchers fired two consecutive rounds at the gates of the Castle. Under the direction of the Syrian reconnaissance officer³¹, storm and thunder broke out. The rockets hit a number of vehicles and the enemy withdrew completely from the Castle. This allowed some of the fighters from both sites to withdraw towards the Litani River, carrying some of the wounded, while others clashed again and were martyred. Between each wave, aviations repeatedly raided the Castle and its surroundings.

31) In 1981 the Syrians had asked to position a reconnaissance group of four fighters in the Castle. Three members of the group withdrew when the war started in 1982, but their commander remained and fought there till the end.

It has been said that the enemy used poisonous gas when they stormed the castle?

According to Saad, the commander of the Central Group, parachutes were dropped from the aircraft at noon. Râssim thought that it was a paratroopers' landing on the Castle. The fighters spread and began shooting at them, and when the parachutes reached the ground, it turned out that it was bombs that emitted smoke when touching the ground. Saad said that he was at that moment under the influence of some kind of indifference. He no longer knew what was going on around him, and despite the severe risk due to the spread of cluster mines, he rushed to the parachutes that landed, thinking he would use them as anti-mosquito nets for the fighters. It seems that the direction of the wind did not help the enemy, because these bombs only affected the members of the Central Group and for a limited time.

Was there a decision to stand till the end?

In the invasion of 1982, our decision was to cling to the Beaufort castle and not to withdraw from other sites of Nabi Taher grove, which we considered, in the military language, as the most important site because it protected the castle.

It was our decision to cling to Beaufort Castle, and it was known that the fighters who were stationed there did not want to withdraw when the other sites were to help the people in the Castle to hold on till the end. The men in the Castle would fight until the last breath, and indeed, the Resistance fighters were fighting until the last person, until martyrdom. The nature of the castle's location made it very difficult to pull out. There is a steep slope, then the one road to the castle, and you must protect this road so you can fight from it. The few brothers who managed to pull out after they did their duty withdrew in the direction of the river across a very rough road, and it took them more than 24 hours to cross the slope and access the river.

The leader of the Castle group was Yacoub Sammour (Râssim), one of the students that we had sent to the military college. He led 34 young Palestinians, Lebanese and Yemeni, an Egyptian fighter and two Turkish fighters. Most of them were martyred after a devastating Israeli bombing and a heroic battle, in which the Israelis suffered unexpected losses. When Begin and Sharon came to the Castle, Begin was surprised and upset by the number of Israeli casualties in their first clash in southern Lebanon. After he boarded the helicopter, the Israelis discovered that a Palestinian fighter was still alive. The wounded fighter moved and shot with his rifle without hitting anyone. They shot back and killed him. Imagine if this incident had happened a few seconds earlier, when Begin was still in the Castle.

Several days later, the enemy asked the residents of the nearby village of Yohmor to bury the martyrs. Our brothers in Yohmor told us that they buried 30 martyrs in a mass grave. Some of the martyrs' bodies, such as Râssim's, were found after the enemy withdrew in 2000. His remains were transferred to Ain al-Hilweh, where he was buried with all due honors. Other martyrs' remains were only discovered during the reconstruction of the Castle in 2013, as the battle had been fierce, and included every inch of the region, and the martyrs spread throughout. In that battle, a hostile helicopter was shot down from low altitude. Martyr Abu Raad al-Yemeni shot it from a 37-mm machine gun after receiving a signal from the Castle that determined the course of the aircraft. The enemy set up a fire wall around the place where it came down. It was later found that five senior officers were on board. They had been turned into a pile of ashes.

There were nearly 50 martyrs in the Castle, Arnoun, Kafr Tibnit, Nabatiyeh and Jibshit, and a number of others were injured. No one was captured and no one surrendered.

What happened to the men after the battle on Beaufort?

The following day, the men started to withdraw in groups. No one knew where the limits of the Israeli invasion would be. They began to evacuate positions in Nabatiyeh and Nabi Taher and Kafr Tibnit and pulled out gradually through Iqlim al-Tuffah. The day after, an ambush was set up against the enemy along the main road between Deir al-Zahrani and Habbush, and two hostile vehicles were destroyed. The withdrawal was organized and contact with all groups was maintained, thanks to the courage and perseverance of Sister Khadija Marwa, whose home in Zerariya we equipped with a radio station that continued to broadcast despite the enemy's occupation of the town. She kept doing her duty until all groups arrived safely in the mountains and the Bekaa. The pull-out operation lasted four or five days before the men had returned to reinforce the mountain area. At that time, Abu Jihad agreed to the proposal to send Hamdi and Mahmoud al-Alûl to organize the resistance in the mountain region to confront the rampant Zionists. In the Bekaa, the men's new mission became the integration and training of the new volunteers, reinforcing the mountain area, supplying Beirut, and launching operations behind enemy lines. The first operation documented by Ali Abu Tawq in his diary was on June 23 in the 'Ammîq plain.

These operations against the Israelis were ignored by everyone and no one spoke of them except one single book by Muhammad Hamza, where he documented all the messages that were sent to the central command of various military units and followed up on

what was published by the media and Zionist sources. If we review the Hebrew sources, we discover that in the period from mid-end June 1982 until the end of 1983 and the battles of Tripoli, the Zionists' losses in these operations were greater than the size of their losses in the entire invasion. It is also remarkable that the size of their losses in that year (1983) is equivalent to the size of their losses in all subsequent Resistance operations until their withdrawal from Lebanon. The reason is that the victory obscured the enemy's judgment, they did not organize themselves, and spread on a very wide area of Lebanese territory, which made them an easy target.

Why did no one talk about these operations and highlight them?

I think that it had been decided to remove the Palestinian Resistance from Lebanon. Therefore, it was not in anyone's interest to talk about the Resistance operations in Lebanon, whether during the siege of Beirut or after leaving Beirut.

Second: the scission³² was taking place. Under these circumstances, it was not considered right to speak about any Resistance operations that could weaken the rationale behind the scission or push towards unifying efforts against the Zionist enemy. It was required to reinforce the schism. Unlike what was expected from us, we were keen not to stop the operations against the enemy, to shed more light on the direction that we ought to follow. We were separating the two issues.

Third: The Resistance in Lebanon was supposed to follow a special pattern, and you should not speak of the Resistance in a different pattern. The main topic of conversation was the Wimpy operation³³. No one spoke of the Aley bus operation, planned by Martyr Abu Ali Tawq in collaboration with our brothers in the mountains, and which caused 60 Israeli casualties. Nor did anyone speak about the bus of Aramoun³⁴ and Martyr Kamal al-Na'lawi (Abu Ali), and dozens of other operations, including the capture of eight Zionist soldiers in Ruwaysat al-Ballût without firing a single shot. This is the largest capture in the history of the Resistance, and yet, it went unnoticed. Ali Abu Tawq left us a notebook assessing more than 40 operations behind the lines, carried out by the battalion's fighters and our brothers in various areas. These operations included the Beqaa, the mountain, the Chouf and the

32) The scission within PLO (Fatah)

33) The Wimpy Operation was an attack on Israeli soldiers in Hamra, a neighbourhood in the west of the Lebanese capital Beirut on September 24, 1982. (Wiki)

34) The Aley and Aramoun operations were two main operations in the mountains, directed against Israeli military buses.

ARAFAT CONFIRMS SHUF COMBAT ROLE

Says Palestinian Forces Are in the Lebanese Mountains Backing Druse Militia

By E. J. DIONNE Jr.
Special to The New York Times

BADDAWI, Lebanon, Sept. 18 — Yasser Arafat, the chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, confirmed today that Palestinians from his group were in the Shuf Mountains supporting the Druse militia forces that have been fighting Christian militia units and the Lebanese Army.

Mr. Arafat said that Palestinian guerrillas had been in the area since before Israel pulled out its troops, and that other Palestinians were there as "volunteers."

"We can't prevent some volunteers from participating," Mr. Arafat said. He declined to say how many Palestinians were in the mountains, declaring, "I will not give you any numbers or any figures."

In the last two weeks, there have been assertions by Lebanese Government officials, their American allies and the Israelis that Palestinians were participating in the fighting in the Shuf region. But the Druse militiamen and their Syrian supporters have persistently denied the reports, and Palestinian leaders had been reluctant to offer comment.

Peace Move Suggested

Lebanese officials said Mr. Arafat's return to Lebanon on Friday could reflect an effort on his part to make peace with the Syrians, who have been backing a dissident group in Al Fatah, the main P.L.O. faction, which Mr. Arafat also heads. The officials said that if Mr. Arafat's efforts were successful, the Syrians might strengthen their position in the mountain fighting, which started at the beginning of this month. However there are no indications that the Syrians are ready to make peace with Mr. Arafat, the officials said.

Mr. Arafat said he had not cleared his visit with the Syrians. "There are some differences between the P.L.O. and the Syrians," he said. "We are trying to limit these and close the gaps."

The Palestinian leader also explicitly linked his visit to the new fighting in Lebanon and the tougher stance of the United States, which has stationed 12 warships off the coast.

In a speech to a wildly cheering throng at the Palestinian camp of Nahr al Barid, Mr. Arafat declared: "We are meeting here when the American fleets are in the sea, with the British and the French and their aircraft. It is not by coincidence or by chance."

Mr. Arafat also declared that the



Yasser Arafat, leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization, holding a young Palestinian in Tripoli, Lebanon. He is flanked by an unidentified Muslim clergyman and by the P.L.O.'s military commander, Abu Jihad.



Yasser Arafat spoke while visiting Palestinian camp at Baddawi

against the Lebanese Army and that his group's mission in the mountains was to fight Israel.

But when asked directly if there were Palestinians in the mountains, he replied: "There are Palestinians. But you know that we are in a Palestinian-Lebanese joint force," a reference to agreements reached between Palestinians and Lebanese Muslims during this country's civil war in the mid-1970's.

Factional Strife in P.L.O.

The visit was Mr. Arafat's first to this Syrian-occupied area near Tripoli since he was expelled from Syria on June 24 because Syria was backing his

opponents in zeal for "the leftist, nationalist struggle in Lebanon."

In their statements during a hectic day, Mr. Arafat and his aides sometimes seemed to contradict each other in their eagerness not to contradict Mr. Jumblat, the head of the Druse Progressive Socialist Party militia, about Palestinian participation in the mountain warfare.

For example, when asked if his Palestinian forces were helping the Druse fight the Lebanese Army, Mr. Arafat said flatly: "No, we are not helping them. We are there only because it is part of our program to follow the Israelis." He added of Mr. Jumblat's forces, "If they ask for our help, we will offer it."

But one of Mr. Arafat's generals, known as Abu Hajem, told reporters that Mr. Arafat's followers had made their way to the front in the Shuf Mountains despite great difficulties.

"Fatah fighters used a special way across the minefields to return to Souk al Gharb, Kaifun and Kabr Chamoun," Abu Hajem said, referring to three major battle sites.

Abu Hajem also said Mr. Arafat's units were consciously being assigned to positions away from members of the anti-Arafat faction, apparently to keep them from fighting each other. Asked if this was the reason, Abu Hajem smiled and said, "You know."

'Not the Palestinian Battle'

Khalid al Wazir, also known as Abu Jihad, who is Mr. Arafat's top aide and adviser, explained the reluctance of Mr. Arafat to make an announcement of the exact role of his followers by saying that it was "a very small civi-

ty war to allow Mr. Jumblat's forces to make such a statement."

"It's not the Palestinian battle," he said. "It's the battle of the Lebanese."

The Lebanese Government has used the reports of Palestinian involvement as part of a broader effort to describe the situation here as "a foreign invasion" rather than a civil war. Officials of President Amin Gemayer's administration say that the Palestinians are part of a broad Syrian effort to undermine the authority of the Government and the Lebanese Army.

Mr. Arafat's assistants said the P.L.O. stood to gain from the fighting if it should result in the installation of a Government more sympathetic to them in Beirut.

Crowd in Camp Is Boisterous

Mr. Arafat managed to escape briefly from the difficulties of politics at the dusty Nahr al Barid camp, where a boisterous crowd shouted his praises as people pushed, shoved and punched for a chance to kiss, touch, or at least see, their leader.

In his speech, Mr. Arafat said Israel's former Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, had expected to "liquidate the revolution and liquidate the Palestinians" in the fighting in Beirut last year.

"And where is Beirut?" Mr. Arafat shouted. "Where is Sharon? Where is Haig? They all went to disaster."

"And where is the Palestinian revolution?" Mr. Arafat asked.

The crowd shouted back affirmative calls, including "We are here!"

"No one can control or change this revolution," Mr. Arafat said later in his address. "No one can change me."

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New York Times, September 19, 1983. Arafat confirms that Palestinian forces are present in the Lebanese mountains.

South regions, in addition to those carried out by the other units.

Who carried out the capture of the soldiers, and how were the soldiers captured?

A patrol from the group of Mahmoud al-Alul carried out the operation, with the help of the mountain groups, comrades of Hilal Raslan (Abu Mahmoud). In those days we always had some bases we could rely on for support and reconnaissance.

The men infiltrated into an Israeli hideout. The soldiers were relaxed, they thought that the newcomers were the shift change or reinforcement team, or mem-

bers of the Lebanese Forces, as our men were speaking Hebrew and French. (The leader of the group, Issa Hajjo, had studied in Algeria.) Our men took their weapons and captured the first four, then arrested the other four inside their dormitory. They made them walk in front after having handcuffed them and loaded their weapons on their backs. But the main question was, how to transfer them to the Beqaa amid Syrian checkpoints? Hamdi asked one of our brothers in the mountain (Muhammad) to contact a Syrian unit commander, an officer from Jabal Al Arab, to facilitate the passage of the group to the Beqaa. The officer shirked politely and said to him: "I have not heard anything from you about this. Don't worry, the men

will manage.” They went to the Popular Front-General Command³⁵ and were allowed to use their vehicles to transport them to the Beqaa. In return for facilitating the passage through Syrian checkpoints, the Popular Front took two of the prisoners.

Things went well, and the prisoners were exchanged during the siege of Tripoli.³⁶ Not only did the exchange release all the prisoners in Ansar, but it also led the enemy to close the Ansar detention camp completely, and to release some prisoners detained in Palestine. As for the General Command operation, they used the two captives they had to unleash a much larger number of prisoners in the Israeli prisons.³⁷

These two prisoners were first transferred by the Popular Front-General Command to Damascus. As for us, the problem was where to keep the captives?

35) Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC)

36) The PLO negotiated the release of 5900 Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners from the Ansar camp in South Lebanon, in return for the repatriation of six Israeli soldiers captured by Fatah in September 1982. This propaganda coup for Arafat was announced on November 24, 1983, and prompted the Syrians to cancel their planned military offensive against PLO in Tripoli and enter into protracted negotiations about the PLO-evacuation from Tripoli which took place in the end of December. (Yezid Sayigh 1997 p. 573.)

37) Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine – General Command (PFLP-GC). Their operation became known as the Nawrass operation, the first operation that led to prisoner exchange with Israel

How do we keep six Israeli soldiers in the Beqaa, at a time when we were trapped between Shtoura and the entrance of Saadnayel-Taalabaya, an area that does not exceed two kilometers, and where hiding six Israeli soldiers is quite difficult. Where to take them, with the prospect of dissent and fighting between dissidents, and the Syrian army who wanted the prisoners, and the Israelis behind us who wanted them too?

The issue of Hamas’ Israeli captive Gilad Shalit had raised the tension of the Zionist security establishment to the level of hysteria, and the success of Hamas in keeping his location secret was considered a great achievement. We had six captives; how did we hide them? If we hid them in a given location and put a guard to watch them, this would soon be revealed by the mere presence of the guard, or just by sending food, or bringing a doctor in. Bottom line, we hid them with the locals. We returned to the mass line, relying on the people. We distributed them to the locals’ homes. They lived in a room, ate the food of the house, none of us came with them or inspected them regularly. If neighbors noticed something, we changed their places. We hid them for more than a year, which is not a short period. But the circle around us began to narrow, and the Beqaa was no longer a safe area. So, we fled to Tripoli despite the heavy checkpoints. We took them one by one and brought them to Tripoli. To hide six soldiers within a two-kilometer circle is in itself a major achievement. But no one today talks about the operations behind the lines, nor of the operations of the Palestinian- Lebanese Resistance during 1982–1983.

Are Hovdenak served as coordinator for Norwegian health workers going to Tripoli in November 1983. They answered a call from Arafat for medical support, when the PLO was besieged there in November 1983. These are photos and excerpts from AH's diary November 5, 1983.



Black smoke from the area around State Oil Refinery. Two oil tanks have been hit. Soon the smoke covers the north-east side of the Baddawi camp, the whole sky is black. The insurgents can take cover behind the wall of smoke, bombarding the camp without being seen from inside. (Photo by Are Hovdenak.)



The Beddawi camp was shelled indiscriminately on the third day of the attack (November 5) by Abu Musa's forces. This picture was taken from the PRCS (Palestinian Red Crescent) hospital of the camp, hours before the hospital was evacuated. (Photo by Are Hovdenak.)



- I take pictures of several families on their way out of the camp, carrying with them their main belongings. (Photo by Are Hovdenak.)



Two small children are running after a mother, who has no hand free to reach out for them, as she is carrying the mattress on her head. (Photo by Are Hovdenak.)



Suddenly, there is shooting in the air outside the hospital. A tank drives up in front of the building, and the men on board are smiling, showing the V-sign. It turns out to be a group from Abu Musa, but they have brought their Syrian tank with them to join Arafat's side. (Photo by Are Hovdenak.)

THE SPLIT AND THE ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM THE MOUNTAINS

Trying to prevent the split in the PLO. Military positioning in the mountain. Retreating in Tripoli. The war of the camps and the martyrdom of Ali Abu Tawq.

Amidst these operations, you were surprised by the scission in Fatah. What is your opinion about it?

During the split, we tried to mediate and told the dissidents: let us talk and understand each other. We formed a committee for dialogue and agreement with Marwan Kayali, Mazen Ezzedine, Abboud Abu Ibrahim and others, but we did not succeed. It was clear that there was some decision that led dissidents to attack our positions and reject any dialogue. They began to attack the positions of the Yarmouk forces. We sent reinforcements to some of these sites. For example, in Deir Zanoun, three young men from the battalion were killed as we were trying to defend the headquarters of the Yarmouk forces.

After that, we felt that things were getting out of control, and that the Syrians and the dissidents would be able to penetrate most of the units. They only needed three or four men, who could shoot from the heart of the unit, then the others could attack from outside, cause confusion and take the unit. We made a bold decision to break down all the units in the area where we were stationed and recompose them. At that time, a large part of our sites in the mountain were devoted to the operations behind the lines of the Zionist enemy. We had positions in Sofar, four or five bases in the mountain, and we kept them during the battle of the dissension. But I can say that the pace of operations against the Zionist enemy rose during that period. We dispersed all the military units in the area and re-formed them to include some of our men in each unit and in each location, and there was no longer the possibility of a breach.

This was also achieved by the existence of elite leadership cadres acting with great awareness and a high degree of national responsibility.

At this point, the military expansion of the dissidents stopped, after they had tried in vain to encircle us by occupying the area of Jdita. Ismaïl Anabah was in charge of the liaison with the Syrian army. They were already in Deir Zanoun and Masnaa, and if they were to take Jdita, and cut off our positions in the mountain, we would be trapped in Taalabaya and Saadnayel. So, we repelled the attack in Jdita. We captured 90 people the same night, left their weapons with them, then returned them the next day. Our position had always been defensive, and we had never initiated an attack. The battle of Jdita ended the possibility for the dis-

sidents to obtain a military solution, so the military schism stopped spreading in our direction.

You have a critical attitude towards the leadership and its policies. Why did you not stand with the dissension, but collided with it instead?

Yes, we had many critical remarks to the leadership approach, but we were careful not to be involved or become instrumental in any internal conflict. When the dissension broke out, our main concern was to prevent Palestinian-Palestinian fighting and to try to solve any problems through dialogue and mutual understanding. We never fought except in defense of our positions, and it was clear to us from the outset that the dissension would weaken the Palestinian Resistance and bring it, as well as the dissidents themselves, out of the arena of struggle against the enemy in Lebanon. This is precisely what happened later.

Even after the outbreak of the hostilities, we tried a lot. We met several times with Abu Musa, Abu Khaled al-Amleh and Abu Akram, in the presence of members of both the Popular and Democratic Fronts. We told them: "You say that Abu Ammar wants to withdraw the troops from the Lebanese arena, and we do not want the troops out of Lebanon, and we want to continue the armed struggle. Why don't we form on the spot a joint battalion, you and us, and let the commander be chosen from your side and his deputy be Brother Marwan. And let nothing else matter for this battalion but to fight the Zionist enemy. Let us issue a joint statement declaring the end of the crisis of dissent and the unity of the 'Assifah forces, directing our joint efforts towards the enemy. Let us declare that these forces will not leave the Lebanese arena and the conflict and call for the return of the rest of the forces that were taken from Beirut. Let us call on the Palestinian leadership to convene an urgent conference to resolve any internal problems within a specific period."

But it turned out that their decision was not in their own hands, as the meetings stopped after this one. There was also a major development in the region because the Zionists decided to withdraw from the mountain area. At this point, we decided to move our troops and flee the schism hostilities by going to the mountains where we could pursue and fight the retreating Zionist forces. We created a joint force with the Democratic Front, the Popular Front and the Palestine Liberation Front, and we formed a joint Pal-

estinian leadership, while the dissidents allied themselves with the PFLP – General Command and wrote on their cars: “The back-to-Beirut troops.”

We had a problem: the Yarmouk forces led by Brother Nasr Youssef, were isolated, and besieged by the Syrian army in Rayak area, so it became imperative to evacuate this force to areas where the Syrians could not follow us. Ali Abu Tawq supervised the transfer of the Yarmouk forces from Rayak to our area, building a bridge of sewage pipes over the river.

Our men arrived to the neighborhood of Hay es-Sellom and Shwayfat, near Beirut, and the Syrians realized that the forces of Yarmouk had escaped the siege and joined us. Abu Ammar knew that we were in Shwayfat and Hay es-Sellom neighborhood and that the road to Beirut was open. He came to Tripoli, the forces of Abu Musa and the PFLP – General Command groups were isolated and had no longer any noticeable presence. Even when you went to the operations room established by Walid Jumblatt, you soon realized that they were collaborating with the Palestinian Resistance, with the joint force that we had established with Mamdouh Nawfal, Marwan and Abu Ahmad Fouad, because we were the effective force working on the ground. But the arrival of Abu Ammar to Tripoli scared the Syrians because Hafez al-Assad felt that things began to slip out of his hands. He immediately decided to besiege us and drive us out of the Beqaa, and the Syrian tanks moved in to besiege us there.

This conflict in the Beqaa and Tripoli with the dissidents and with the Syrian army was unfortunate because it was contrary to our line, vision, principles, and the priority of the struggle against the Zionist enemy. Our goal and slogan were always to have all the guns aimed at the Zionist enemy. Unfortunately, we were always in a state of self-defense.

According to your experience, how did other factions perform and how was your relationship with them?

The commander of the Fatah force in the region was also commander and primary responsible of the joint Palestinian-Lebanese forces. This meant that you had to deal with all the forces and factions in your area. Significantly, you could not put all the units in one cuff, because they were not ruled by one unified standard. It all depended on the quality of the leading cadre. This also applied to the Fatah units. In some cases, we almost clashed with elements from Fatah due to bad behavior and excesses.

As far as the factions were concerned, you could not assess the faction's behavior based on their ideology or convictions, as everything depended on the cadre or leader you were dealing with. In Bint Jbeil, for example, we could not distinguish between the

brigade's and the Popular Front's fighters as the region's official from PFLP was Maher al-Yamâni and we were in total agreement with him, sharing the same spirit. I can also pay tribute to the Communist Action Organization's faction there and its high discipline, while we were unable to understand the cadres of the Democratic Front and the Sa'iqa. In Nabatiyeh, the subject was different. The Democratic Front was led by Comrade Ajaj, who was one of the most disciplined and committed people, as was the leader of as-Sa'iqa there, Comrade Khaled Azhiman, whose group was able to shoot down an airplane with a Strela rocket in the 1982 invasion. But our common understanding with the Popular front (PFLP) there was at the lowest level. The relationship in the Beqaa and the Mountain with the Palestinian leader Mamdouh Nawfal was unique, as it was with his chief of staff, Khaled Abdel Rahim, and the whole cadre of the Democratic Front, as well as with Abu Ahmed Fuad and the cadres of the Popular Front. What I want to say is that positive or negative individual traits became more important than organizational affiliation or party and intellectual education, and these traits often controlled relationships, a phenomenon that must be studied in the experience of the revolution.

What about the Camp War and the role of Ali Abu Tawq in Shatila? When he returned, did he return to rebuild the safe base, or did he come back to protect the people in the camps?

In the final phase of our presence in Tripoli, we established a large work cell led by Ali Abu Tawq and Marwan Kayali, with the help of a large part of the Shabâb³⁸ in the Mountain, the South, Beirut, and the North. The cell was preparing to transport weapons and equipment from Tripoli to Beirut and the South. Even though we were in Tripoli, there were operations behind enemy lines in Lebanon.

We left Tripoli but kept some groups there. The main body of the battalion went to Tunisia and Algeria, but it was our intention to return to Lebanon to fight the Zionist enemy, who was still occupying a large part of southern Lebanon. However, when this was put forward, there was little response from the leadership. They feared that our plan would not be successful and believed that the international and Arab political situation prevented the re-establishment of an armed Palestinian presence in Lebanon.

The battalion's cadres made the first steps of the return. They took the lead and initiated the decision to return to Lebanon. The goal was clear: to con-

38) Note of the translator: Shabâb means “young men”. It can also mean “comrades”, in militant context.

front the Zionist enemy and only the Zionist enemy. We started back in the direction of Cyprus and from there to Tripoli, then to the rest of the regions. Some of the brothers returned through Beirut airport in coordination with the brothers in the Lebanese-Palestinian Resistance and at the forefront of them Imad Mughniyeh.

In the first stage, most of the returnees were cadres of the battalion, led by Martyrs Marwan, Ali, Ahmed Montaser and Abu El Feda. Ali Abu Tawq settled in Saida at this stage. Several operations were carried out behind the lines of the Zionist enemy. Khalil and Abu Hamdi were killed in a major clash with the enemy in the outskirts of Zerariya.

When Abu Ammar felt that our idea was starting to succeed, he did not wait long. He created the Lebanese committee to oversee the return of hundreds of cadres and fighters from various places to the Lebanese arena.

Lebanon, in turn, after 1982, witnessed a very complex situation: Clashes between all parties even among those who were in the same ditch during the last phase. Battles in Tripoli between the Syrian army and the Tawhid movement ended with Iranian mediation. There were battles between Aoun and Geagea, then between Aoun and the Syrian army.

In the light of this Arab and Lebanese situation, the Syrian decision was clear: Holding on to the Lebanese file in all its details, even if it meant to forbid any armed Palestinian presence in Lebanon, even their allies, some of whom were placed under house arrest in Damascus.

From here began the siege of the camps, or what was later known as the war of the camps, under the pretext of ending the influence of Arafat there.

The Shatila camp was sealed by the Amal movement and the sixth brigade of the Lebanese army. Ali Abu Tawq was forced to attend Shatila. A war of a new kind began, the war of the camps. I was in that period in almost daily contact with Ali in Shatila, and Abu Ammar called me every once and then to ease the tension between him and Ali. Brother Abu Ammar's main concern was to put pressure on the Syrians, and the camps war gave him good material for that. Ali and I were striving to stop this war in any way and go back to southern Lebanon. As for the Syrians, their obsession was to exclude the Palestinian card from the Lebanese arena. They did not want it, neither in the camps nor in the South under any banner, even the banner of their allies, in the wake of their disagreement with the Palestinian leadership over the priorities of resolving the conflict in the Middle East. Abu Ammar was seeking to retrieve his role in Lebanon, while we sought to return to fight against the Israelis in southern Lebanon, and at the same time to find a mechanism to

protect the situation in the camps and not allow their collapse.

Ali, in the Shatila camp, performed a legendary work. After Ali's death, I learned from Dr. Giannou that Ali contacted him and told him: "I want you in the camp because we want to open a field hospital and a clinic." Dr. Giannou said to the Palestinian Red Crescent Society: "I want to go to the camp" and they told him: "But the camp has no potential." Dr. Giannou said to them: "There is Ali Abu Tawq. If Ali is there, everything becomes possible." And indeed, Dr. Giannou went and stayed in the camp, aware that he had a heroic record with us in Nabatiyeh and Tripoli. He established a hospital in Shatila from nothing, and there, despite the siege and the mad bombing, Ali took care of everything: From defense and perseverance to the provision of medicines, food, milk and diapers. He was assisted by some of the brothers in Beirut, and by members of Hezbollah and other Lebanese factions.

Two years ago³⁹, I was in Beirut to participate in a conference. I decided to visit Maroun al Ras. The bus that I happened to take carried many young men and women from Shatila and the other camps, and I was surprised how, all along the way, they were singing hymns and songs all about Ali Abu Tawq. Then in Maroun al-Ras, I was asked to give a public talk about the first battle in the village in 1978, and so everyone knew about my relationship with Ali. I asked some of them, do you know Ali Abu Tawq? They said: No, but we hear about him from our parents.

From a generation to the next, the word of Abu Ali was transmitted, a great legend passed on by generations, not only in Shatila, but in all the places where we were working. At the beginning of his work in the organization, Ali Abu Tawq received the mission of organizing students in high schools in Beirut and he transformed them within three months. This goes back to 1975 or 1976. Ali's personality was unique. When he was martyred everyone mourned him, from the youngest child in Shatila, to his companions, or Brother Abu Ammar, who was attending a summit when he heard the news and turned the summit into a eulogy council for the martyr.

Do you happen to know how he died?

Stories around his martyrdom are contradictory: It was said that he was killed by a shell. The brothers in Lebanon sent me a video documenting an investigation with two men saying that they were from the Abu Khaled al-Amleh group, and that the latter ordered

39) The interview was conducted and first published in 2013

I watched that tape together with Abu Ammar and we both agreed at the time that the discussion on this subject had to stop. There was an almost unified position in the defense of the camps, even elements of the “Fatah Intifada” were present inside the camp to confront Amal movement, regardless of the existence of pro-Syrian infiltration from time to time. We decided that talking about this issue could break up or blow up the Palestinian situation inside the camps, so we agreed to cover this issue and to leave it to the people in Lebanon. What happened, truly, I do not know. I cannot be sure.

There is a Palestinian project and there are people and forces that want to inherit this project, to carry the banner, namely Iran and Hezbollah on the one hand, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hamas movement on the other. Why did the original Palestinian national project, the “Fatah” project, stop?

The emerging Arab revolutionary situation⁴⁰, or these new socio-political dynamics in the region, how do you relate them to the Palestinian national project?

40) The interview was conducted in 2013, the question refers to the so-called “Arab spring”.



the need to build a broad national front, and reject the policies of exclusive appropriation of power. Our region is still in the phase of national liberation, which requires the mobilization of the majority of the forces to be able to accomplish the tasks of the transition phase. The party that wins the majority of the votes at the ballot box has the greater responsibility to mobilize other forces within this front, and to block any maneuvers of foreign strife or interference. What has happened gives greater hope to our people that things never remain the same in the long run, and that the winds of change and revolution are looming.

Confrontation with the external enemy gives you the ability to ensure the unity of the nation and to address your other social problems. If you only work on how to deal with the internal problems, you may as well sink into the details. This may drain all the efforts and you lose the priorities. Nothing can help the revolutions of the Arab Spring except indulging more in the national project, and the national project is based on confronting the Zionist enemy.

GLOSSARY

Al'Assifah. Military wing of Fateh, the name means tempest.

Amal. (Regiments of the Lebanese Resistance) was originally developed as an armed wing of the Movement of the Disinherited founded by Musa Sadr. In 1980 Nabih Berri became one of the leaders of Amal, marking the entry of Amal in the Lebanese Civil War. Amal fought a long campaign against Palestinian refugees (called the War of the Camps). Later on Amal fought against rival Shi'a group Hezbollah which was formed by religious members of Amal who had left after Nabih Berri's assumption of full control and the subsequent resignation of most of Amal's earliest members.

Arab Deterrent Force (ADF) was a peacekeeping force created by the Arab League on the extraordinary Riyadh Summit on October 17–18, 1976, endorsed and implemented by the Arab League's Cairo summit on October 25–26, 1976.

Bar Lev line. A chain of fortifications built by Israel along the eastern bank of the Suez Canal after it captured the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt during the June 1967 War. It was considered impregnable and was a symbol of Israeli military perfection. It was overrun in 1973 by the Egyptian military

Bhamdoun, Battle of. As part of a Syrian offensive against PLO positions, Bhamdoun was struck by Syrian artillery on October 13, 1976. The bulk of the defenders from the Joint Forces had withdrawn to Aley by October 14, but 30 members of Fateh's student brigade formed a new defence line, and Abu Jihad arrived at midday ordering reinforcements. For Arafat the point was to check the Syrian advance long enough to allow sufficient time to mobilize Arab diplomatic intervention for a ceasefire.

Central Sector. A separate operational command in Fateh of around 300 lightly armed guerrillas in the Bint Jbail and Qana districts in the central region of South Lebanon.

Contradiction. As the concept was used by Karl Marx and later Mao Zedong, usually refers to an opposition of social forces. Capitalism is internally contradictory because different social classes have conflicting collective goals. These contradictions stem from the social structure of society and inherently lead to class conflict, economic crisis, and eventually the existing order's overthrow and the formerly oppressed classes' ascension to political power. Not all contradictions are of the same importance. There are secondary contradictions, and the main contradiction. The main or principal contradiction is the one allowing other contradictions to exist. There is always only one principal contradiction; however, the contradictions can trade places of importance. To handle a situation involving numerous contradictions, it is important to correctly identify the main contradiction.

Cultural Revolution. A sociopolitical movement in China from 1966 until 1976. Launched by Mao Zedong. Its stated goal was to preserve Chinese Communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society.

Damour. Was a maronite coastal village south of Beirut. After phalangists had attacked muslim inhabitants in the coastal slum of east Beirut (Maslakh- Karantina), expelling the survivors to West Beirut, Lebanese leftist groups occupied Damour supported by Palestinians, and drove out the inhabitants, after efforts to negotiate a deal had failed.

DFLP. Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, organization within PLO.

Gang of Four. A political faction composed of four Chinese Communist Party officials. They came to prominence during the Cultural Revolution and were later charged with a series of treasonous crimes.

Geneva Conference of 1973. Was an attempt to negotiate a solution to the Arab–Israeli conflict as envisioned in United Nations Security Council Resolution 338 following the called-for cease-fire to end the Yom Kippur War (the Arab–Israeli War October 6–25, 1973). There was a hope among some UN-members that some sort of international agreement on the Palestinian problem could be reached. In January 1977 Arafat declared that PLO was willing to attend the proposed Geneva Peace Conference. However, attempts in later years to revive the Conference have failed.

Karameh (Battle of). Village on the East Bank of Jordan River. The name means dignity. Instead of withdrawing under an Israeli attack on March 21, 1968, Fateh argued that steadfastness was necessary to dispel the myth of Israeli invincibility and to raise the morale. Jordanian and Palestinian fighters resisted in spite of much smaller forces. They suffered heavy losses, but the Israelis were forced to withdraw.

Kataeb – the Lebanese Phalanges Party (*al-Kata'ib*). political party in Lebanon. Despite being officially secular, it is supported mainly by Maronite Catholics. The party played a major role in the Lebanese Civil War (1975–90). The party slowly re-emerged in the early 2000s.

Kfar Shuba (Battle of). Border village in South Lebanon. The Israeli army carried out a ground operation January 11, 1975, but the local Fateh garrison withstood repeated Israeli probes. The Lebanese left mobilized hundreds of volunteers to take part in the battle and later help the villagers repair their homes.

Lebanese Forces. Christian based political party and former militia (during the Lebanese Civil War).. Created in 1976 during the Civil War as an umbrella organization co-ordinating all the right-wing party militias of the Lebanese Front, but mainly composed of the Kataeb Party.

Lebanese National Movement (LNM). A front of leftist, communist and panarabist nationalist parties and organisations, led by Kamal Jumblatt, a prominent Druze leader. It was active during the Lebanese Civil War, and supported the PLO.

Lebanese Phalanges Party. See Kata'eb.

Main contradiction. See Contradiction.

Mass Line. Organizational and leadership method developed by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party during the Chinese revolution and later applied by many communists. The essential is to respect the masses, consult the masses, interpret their suggestions and enforce the resulting policies.

PFLP. Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, organization within PLO. Second largest after Fateh.

PFLP-GC (General Command). Founded in 1968 by Ahmed Jibril, Syrian-backed splinter group from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

People's War. A military strategy first developed by Mao Zedong. The basic concept is to maintain the support of the population and draw the enemy deep into the countryside where the population will defeat them through a mix of mobile warfare and guerrilla warfare.

Political commissioner or commissar. A supervisory officer responsible for the political education (ideology) and organization of the unit they are assigned to, and intended to ensure civilian political control of the military.

Safe base. The importance of establishing safe bases in the strategy of guerrilla warfare, was underlined first by Mao Zedong in China (On Guerilla Warfare) and later by general Võ Nguyên Giáp in the national liberation war in Viet Nam. It was also mentioned in strategic documents of Fatah.

Saraaya al Jihad al Islami (The Islamic Jihad Brigades). Islamist faction formed from within Fateh. Served as a bridge to the new islamist forces emerging in Palestine in the 1980s.

Social imperialism. According to Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin, "socialist in words, imperialist in deeds". Said by Maoists about the Soviet Union.

South Lebanese Army SLA. Also known as the Haddad Militia and later the Lahad Militia, was founded in the late 1970s based on the First Battalion of the Lebanese army. After Israel's withdrawal and the end of their Litani Operation in 1978, the unit was deployed in

the Bint Jbeil area under the command of Major Saad Haddad and Major Sami Shedi'ac. Recognized by the UN as the power in effective control of the territory, the SLA initially coordinated with Israeli officers and later operated under almost direct Israeli command via the Yakal (the Israeli Liaison Unit to Lebanon).

Syrian Social Nationalist Party. Secular nationalist political party established in Beirut 1932. A branch of the pan-Syrian Social Nationalist Party. It advocates subsuming Lebanon into a Greater Syrian nation state spanning the Fertile Crescent. It was active in the resistance against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon from 1982 to 2000 while continuously supporting the Syrian presence in Lebanon.

Tal al-Zaatar (the Hill of Thyme). Palestinian refugee camp established in 1948 in the northern part of Beirut, with a population of approximately 20 000 in 1976. During the Lebanese Civil War, the camp was attacked by the Christian militias together with troops from the Lebanese internal security forces. The militias laid siege to the refugee camp for 3 months. On August 12, 1976, the Christian militias gained control over the camp thanks to support from the Syrian army. The inhabitants of the camp were evicted and a substantial part of its population was massacred.

Tawhid movement. Lebanese Sunni Muslim organisation. It plays an active role in Tripoli politics since the Lebanese Civil War in the 1980s.

Ten-point Program. Was accepted by the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in Cairo on June 8, 1974. It called for the establishment of a national authority "over every part of Palestinian territory that is liberated" with the aim of "completing the liberation of all Palestinian territory". This implied that the liberation of Palestine might be partial (at least, at some stage), and though it emphasized armed struggle, it allowed the PLO to engage in diplomatic channels, and provided validation for future compromises.

Verdun operation. On April 10, 1973, poet and PLO spokesman Kamal Nasser and Fateh leaders Kamal Adwan and Abu Yussuf Najjar were murdered in their homes in West Beirut (rue Verdun) by a Mossad assassination squad led by Ehud Barak (later Israeli prime minister).

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN THE INTERVIEW

Abu Hassan Qassem (Muhammad Al-Bahays). One of the founders of the Student Brigade. Together with other Fateh members he later established Saraaya al Jihad al Islami (brigades of Islamic Jihad). He was killed by a car bomb in Limassol, Cyprus February 14th 1988 together with Hamdi Tamimi and Marwan Kayali. The explosive devise had supposedly been planted by Mossad agents.

Abu Musa (al-Muragha, Said) (1927–2013). Born in Silwan. Joined the Jordanian Army in 1948. Commanded an alliance between the PLO and Lebanese militias, which fought the Syrians when Syria intervened in the Lebanese Civil War in 1976. In November 1983, Abu Musa was expelled from the PLO's military and formed Fatah Uprising (or Fatah al-Intifada in Arabic) in opposition to Arafat. Supported by the Syrians in military confrontations in Tripoli and Bekaa in 1983 with PLO-forces loyal to Arafat.

Abu Shaar, Jawad. Head of Fateh's Militia and Fateh Military council member in the early 1970s. Killed during fighting in Beirut on June 8, 1976.

al-Alûl, Mahmoud, b. 1950 in Nablus. After the Israeli occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Alûl was arrested and later expelled to Jordan, where he joined Fatah. He returned to Nablus in 1995 and became the first governor of the Nablus governorate when Israeli forces withdrew from the town after the Oslo agreement. Elected to the Central Committee of Fatah in August 2009, and as Vice Chairman in 2016.

al-Amleh, Abu Khaled. Officer in Jordanian Army who joined Fateh. Commander in the joint forces of PLO and the Lebanese National Movement. Key dissident leader in the two splits that hit Fateh 1983 and 1984. Secretary general of Fatah al-Intifada.

al-Tamimi, Basim Sultan (Hamdi). One of the founders of the Student Brigade, and later of Saraaya al-Jihad al-Islami (he Islamic Jihad Brigades). He worked closely with abu Hassan Qassem, and was killed in Cyprus in 1988 together with him and Marwan Kayali.

Allush, Naji. Born in Birzeit in 1935, an early recruit to Fateh; joined Abu Nidal's leftist alliance against Yasser Arafat during Fateh's Third Congress in Damascus in 1971; Established the Arab People's Movement as he left the Fatah Revolutionary Council (Abu Nidal) in 1977. General secretary of the Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists. Died in 2012.

'Assal, George (Abu Khaled). Brother of Munir Shafiq, one of the founders of the Student Brigade, and of the main leaders. Commander in the battle of Sannin, where he was killed (1976).

Chidiac, Sami. Lebanese officer who led the South Lebanese Army (SLA) together with Saad Haddad.

Fadl-Allâh, Muhammad Hussein (1935–2010). Prominent Shia cleric and Lebanese political leader from a Lebanese family. Born in Najaf, Iraq, Fadlallah studied Islam in Najaf before moving to Lebanon in 1952.

In the media Fadlallah was sometimes called the "spiritual mentor" of Hezbollah.

Fahs, Hani (1946–2014). Prominent Shiite cleric, advisor to the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Cofounder of the Arab Committee for the Islamic-Christian Dialogue.

Giannou, Chris. Greek-Canadian surgeon (b. 1949). From 1980 in charge of the PRCS hospital in Nabathyie. Head of medical team in Shatila refugee camp during "Camps War". He later served as chief surgeon for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). (C. Giannou. *Besieged*. London 1991, Bloomsbury Publishing PLC.)

Haddad, Saad (1936–1984). Founder and head of the South Lebanon Army (SLA) during the Lebanese Civil War. For years closely collaborating and receiving arms and political support from Israel against Lebanese government forces, Hezbollah, and the Syrian Army. Died of cancer in his home in Marjayoun.

Jallud, Abdullah (Abu Dawud). Former Arab Nationalist Movement cadre and PLA lieutenant 1956–67, Fateh officer and central committee member.

Jaradat, Saad. Member of Fateh in Jordan 1968–70, deputy head the Jordanian Affairs Bureau. First commander of the Student Brigade. Killed in Ras al Nabaa (Beirut) June 26, 1976 during a fight with the phalangists.

Kayali, Marwan. Deputy commander of the Student Brigade when Muin Taher took over leadership. Killed in Cyprus in 1988 together with abu Hassan Qassem and Hamdi Tamimi.

Khalaf, Salah Mesbah (Abu Iyad) (1933–1991). Deputy chief and head of intelligence for the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the second most senior official of Fatah after Yasser Arafat.

Mikhail, Hanna (Abu Omar) (1935–1976). Born in Ramallah, Palestine. Ph.D in Political Science from Harvard University. Taught at Princeton University and University of Washington Seattle – USA. In 1969 Hanna joined the Palestinian Resistance Movement in Jordan. Moved to Beirut in 1971, worked at the Palestinian Research Centre and the Planning Centre. In July 1976 Abu Omar and nine of his comrades and two sailors disappeared while on their way by sea to the besieged Palestinian camps in Northern Lebanon. The French writer Jean Genet mentions Abu Omar frequently in his book *Un Captif Amoureux* (Prisoner of love).

Mourad, Ismat (Dr. Mourad). Militant of Fateh and the Student Brigade.

Mughniyeh, Imad Fayez (1962–2008). Was active in coordinating the resistance inside and outside Palestine. Became number two in Hezbollah's leadership, understood to have overseen Hezbollah's military, intelligence, and security apparatuses.

Naccache, Anis. Born in Beirut, Lebanon 1951. In 1982, he was sentenced in France to life in prison for attempting to kill the old prime minister of Iran, Sha-

pour Bakhtiar. Released and extradited in 1990. He later became a geopolitical analyst in Lebanon

Omar, Mahjoub (Ra'uf Nazmi) (1932–2012) Egyptian medical doctor, intellectual and militant, joined Fateh after the June 1967 war. Served as Deputy director of the PLO Planning centre in Beirut. The French writer Jean Genet met Dr. Mahjoub in Jordan when he stayed with the resistance there and mentions him in his book *Un Captif Amoureux* (Prisoner of love).

Qabalan, Abdul Amir (Mufti al-Jaafari al-Mumtaz). High level Shia cleric. Head of Lebanon's Supreme Islamic Shiite Council.

Raslan, Hilal (Abu Mahmoud). Former Syrian ambassador to Beijing. Joined the Student Brigade with others from "the mountain group" who were planning to establish a Lebanese-Arabic communist party on a Maoist basis.

Sadr, Musa. Born 1928. Lebanese Iranian philosopher and Shi'a religious leader. Founded the Movement of the Disinherited in 1974 to press for better economic and social conditions for the disadvantaged Shia pop-

ulation of Lebanon. Attempted to prevent the descent into violence that eventually led to the Lebanese Civil War. During the war, he aligned himself with the Lebanese National Movement. Disappeared in Libya in 1978. His legacy is revered by both Amal and Hezbollah followers.

Shafiq, Munir (Abu Fadi). Born 1936 in Jerusalem in a Christian family. Member of the Jordanian Communist Party until 1965 and spent several years in Jordanian prison. Joined Fateh in the early 1970s as a Palestinian - Arab nationalist and leftist. In 1973 he was one of the founders of the Student Brigade in Fateh. Served as director of the PLO Planning centre in Beirut. Together with other members of the Brigade he later turned to Islam as reference for both political and personal orientation. General coordinator of the Nationalist-Islamic Congress, which unites and coordinates the majority of Arab and Islamic nationalist organisations.

Ubaryand, Nazir. Militant of Fateh and the Student Brigade.

PLACES MENTIONED IN THE INTERVIEW

Lebanon is divided into governorates (mohafazah), districts (caza) and municipalities.

Aintoura. Town and municipality in the Mount Lebanon Governorate, 18 kilometers north of Beirut. Its inhabitants are predominantly Maronite Christians.

Aynata. Village in South Lebanon. During the war with Israel in 2006, about 60 % of the homes in the town were destroyed. The family home of Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah.

Bhamdoun. See Glossary.

Beit Lif. Village in the Bint Jbeil District in southern Lebanon.

Bint Jbeil. Large town in south Lebanon, administrative centre within the Nabatieh governorate.

Borj Shamali. Municipality near Tire city, with a large refugee camp (25 000 inhabitants in 2018) which was established in 1948 to provide for refugees from Palestine. The camp is situated at the beginning of a main road to the South.

Jabal Al Arab. Also known as Jabal al-Druze (Mountain of the Druze). Elevated volcanic region in the As-Suwayda Governorate of southern Syria. Most of the inhabitants of this region are Druze, but there are also small Sunni Muslim and Christian communities.

Jounieh. City north of Beirut, population mainly Christians, stronghold of the Christian tight wing.

Jwaya or Jouaiya. Village in Tire district, Lebanon. Located geographically in the center of Jabal Amel (or Jabal Amil), 95 kilometers south of Beirut.

Kahale. Mountain village in the district of Aley, 13 km from Beirut. Population estimated at 13,000 residents, all of whom are Maronite Catholic.

Karameh. See Glossary.

Kaslik. Maronite town in the Mount Lebanon Governorate, north of Beirut.

Kfar Shuba. See Glossary.

Kunin. Municipality located in Bint Jbeil District, south-east of Tebnine.

Masyaf. City in northwestern Syria, approximately 40 kilometers to the west of Hama. A religiously diverse population of 22 000 Ismailis, Alawites and Christians (2004).

Rabb Talatin. Village in the Marjeyoun District of Nabatieh Governorate in southern Lebanon.

Rachaf or Rchaf. Village in the Bint Jbeil District of the Nabatieh Governorate of Southern Lebanon, 16 kilometres from the Israel-Lebanon border.

Rmeish. Village located in the District of Bint Jbeil, near the Lebanese-Israeli border.

Saadnayel. A town in the Bekaa Valley in the Zahlé District of Lebanon.

Saida (Arabic) or Sidon. The third-largest city in Lebanon, with about 80 000 inhabitants within the city limits and more than a quarter-million in the surrounding area.

Sidon. See Saida.

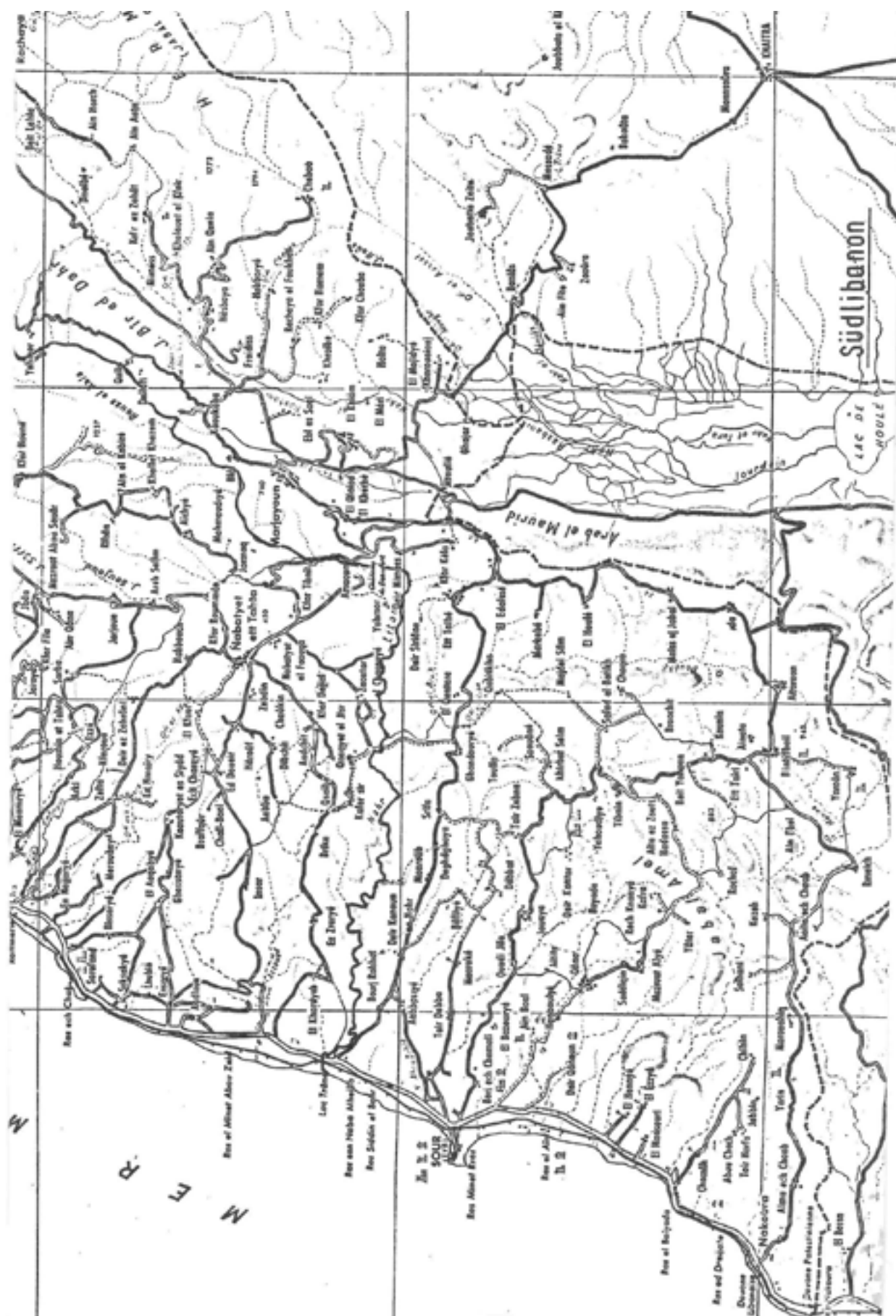
Sofar. Small village situated next to the main road linking Beirut with Damascus.

Sour (Arabic) or Tire, Tyr. One of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world, today the fifth largest city in Lebanon. It is the capital of the Tire District in the South Governorate. Approximately 200 000 inhabitants (2016) including many refugees.

Taalabaya. Town in the Bekaa valley.

Tire, Tyr. See Sour.

Zerariya. Village near Saida.





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ISBN 978-82-991592-5-8
978-82-991592-6-5 (ePub)

